

10-STORY ALL DIFFERENT! DETECTIVE

MARCH

MAGAZINE



10¢

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by G.T. FLEMING-ROBERTS



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10-STORY DETECTIVE

MAGAZINE

ALL STAR
ALL DIFFERENT

Vol. IX

March, 1944

No. 4

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The trail of the missing Anthony Blossom is not strewn with roses—it is carpeted by corpses instead.
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An unknown radio censor edits the Nightmare Hour with a bloody pencil.
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Fresh-killed bodies can draw sheriffs as well as vultures.
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When the hot seat switch is thrown, a new victim seventy miles away will be added to the condemned man's record.

Cover by George J. Rozen

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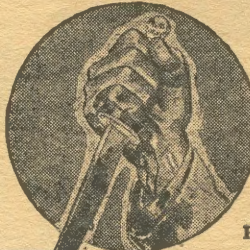
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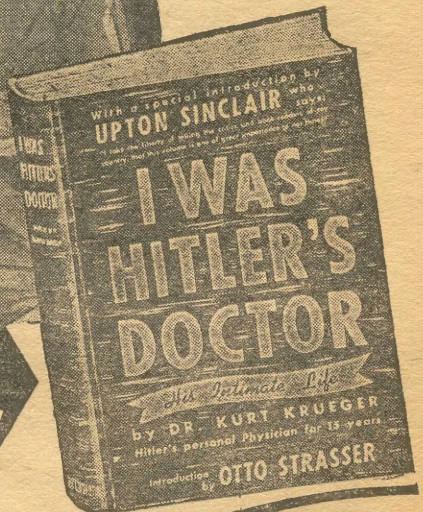
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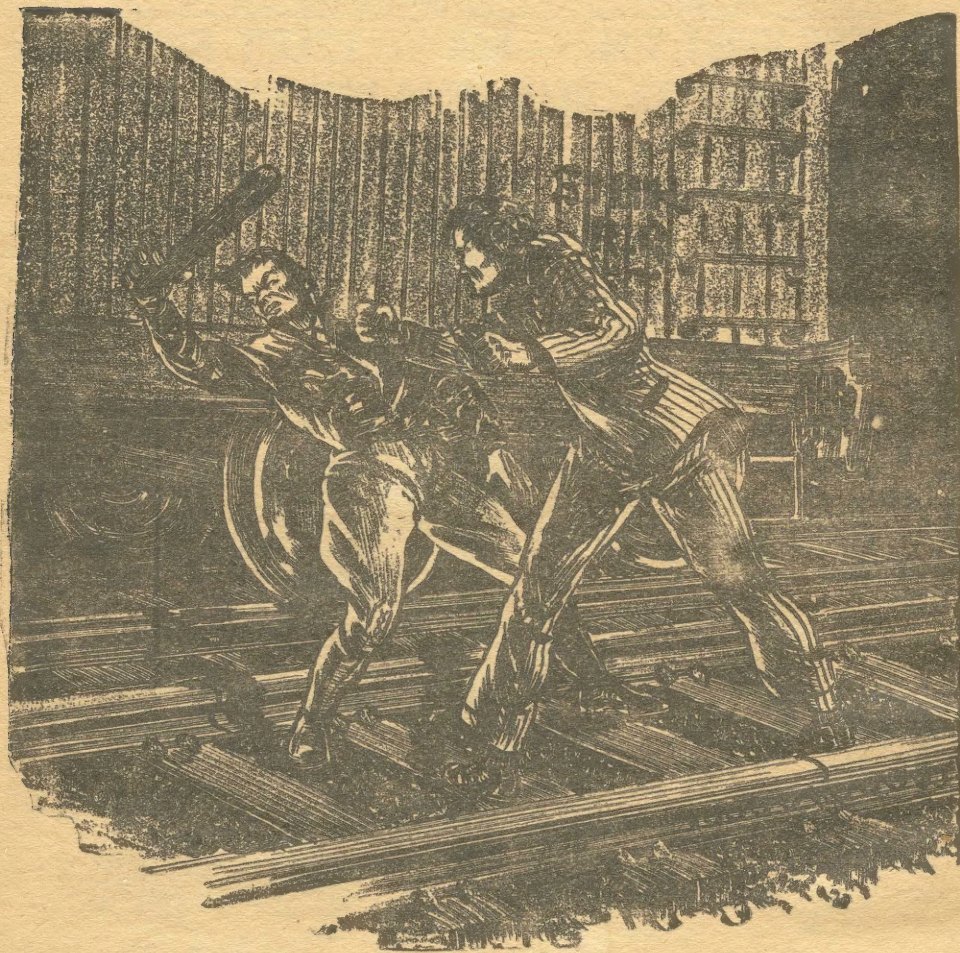
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Unusual Crime Novelet



★ ★ ★

Anthony Blossom had disappeared and Peter Rugg set out to locate him. But instead of finding his way strewn with blossoms, Peter's route was carpeted with corpses with a bareskin Rugg hide waiting at the end.

★ ★ ★

By G. T. Fleming-Roberts



CHAPTER I

IT WAS too bad about Anthony Blossom. He had been well thought of in Lansing for his civic spirit, his opposition to bingo, short skirts, and Sunday baseball. He was an ardent prohibitionist and always willing to lecture on the tobacco evil.

He was, in short, a flat tire at anybody's blowout, but life for him had not been without its lighter moments. He played a mean game of tennis as attested by an accumulation of trophies which he had refused to re-

linquish to the Boy Scouts during the scrap metal campaign.

In business he had been highly successful. Maybe it was his astigmatism, but he had always managed to read the Golden Rule, *Do others before they can do you.*

Anyway, early in April, Anthony Blossom had dipped into his hoard of gasoline and taken a motor trip, going west from Lansing to South Haven with the intention of following the lake shore all the way to the Straits of Mackinac. Somewhere along the

line he had vanished, stepped into the void—or possibly Lake Michigan—without leaving a forwarding address.

He was so well-liked, this sanctimonious old sinner, that nobody bothered to investigate until about the end of July. Then a client, who wished to remain anonymous, sneaked into Detroit's Consolidated Inquiry Agency and put good money across the board to find out what had become of Anthony Blossom.

"After nearly four months," thought Peter Rugg, the Consolidated dick who had drawn the assignment, "Anthony ought to be one blossom that's more attractive to flies than butterflies."

Up north in Grand Traverse County the trail of Anthony Blossom petered out entirely. There state police had picked up his car, its gas tank, radiator, and crankcase dry, suggesting perhaps that the car had been stolen. But of Anthony Blossom himself, there was not so much as a footprint in blow-sand.

Peter Rugg, in a rattletrap car that was miserly with both gas and human comfort, retraced his route to come finally into the fruit farming section of southwest Michigan.

His first night out of Detroit he had spent at a little town called Engles. He remembered seeing from his hotel window the new yellow timbers of a single oil derrick thrusting out of this land of orchard and vineyard. A bit further north there was oil aplenty and fortunes had grown like mushrooms out of the tilled fields. Maybe the region around Engles had been similarly blessed.

For Peter Rugg that lonely oil derrick was simply the makings of a vague hunch, perhaps the first narrow glimpse behind the black curtain that shrouded the fate of Anthony Blossom.

In the shimmering heat of that August afternoon, Rugg came rolling back into Engles to bump over the Pere Marquette tracks and reach a shuddering stop in the front of the

fruit exchange. He crossed the broad street, a short solidly built figure of a man in bright blue tropic worsted, his hair grown frosty at the temples and shading at the crown into a crisp light brown that was something like a cocoa fiber door mat.

WHEN he entered the Elite Quick Service Lunch, three men huddled at a table at the rear immediately fell silent to examine Rugg with a curiosity which he felt was faintly hostile.

Like, he thought, this was moonshine country below the Mason-Dixon Line and all us Ruggs were revenuers.

The three men at the table were farmers. Maybe the stalwart individual in the near-Panama and tan slacks was president of the local bank as well, but the bronzed leathered skin and the wrinkles from squinting against the sun were unmistakable. The two other members of the trio wore overalls. One was loose-jointed, big-boned, black-bearded and unwashed. The right side of his gaunt-featured face was distorted by an oversize quid of tobacco and the silver streaks in his beard were tobacco tarnished.

The third was chubby, short, a department store Santa Claus without the red suit and cotton whiskers, but a Santa Claus who couldn't get priorities on playthings; and Santa looked worried.

In fact, Rugg decided, all three looked worried.

Rugg climbed onto a stool in front of the counter and asked a slatternly woman in soiled pink for a bottle of beer. The woman made her unhurried way to the rear, paused as she reached the latitude of the three men at the table.

"That's him," she stage-whispered behind a big hand. And Rugg thought, *Huh-m-m-m.*

Three heads drew closer together over the tablecloth and steak sauce bottles. Three heads nodded agree-

ment. Then the men got up and came over to the counter.

Rugg invited, "Join me in a beer, boys?"

The bearded scarecrow nudged the good-looking big fellow who wore slacks. "What'd I tell you? Asking would we have a beer!"

"Shsh," the fat one said. "Lem, you let Peevey handle this."

Peevey, if that was the name of the big man, said, "No thanks," in answer to Rugg's invitation. His voice was like dry ice.

Rugg shrugged heavy shoulders and attempted to ignore the trio. That proved difficult. Lem of the untidy beard took a stool on Rugg's right. There was an unpleasant odor of plug tobacco, sweat and the not too good earth about him. The chubby number perched on the next stool over, while Peevey wiped a portion of the lunch counter with a handkerchief before parking his elbow on Rugg's left. It was a pincers movement. Rugg didn't like it.

His beer came, warm from the cooler, and he poured a glass that was two-thirds collar. He asked anybody, "Did they strike a gusher just west of town? I noticed the oil rig."

Rugg felt glances tossed back and forth in front of his nose—glances like knives. But no answers.

"Your name would be Rugg, wouldn't it?" big Peevey asked.

Rugg nodded into his beer. "Would be. Will be until I die, I guess."

"Speed the day," the chubby man murmured.

Rugg put down his glass and looked blankly at the fat farmer. "You boys got something cooking on the back burner I haven't got wind of yet?"

"Carter means," said the odorous Lem on Rugg's right, "that we don't like snoops around here."

Peevey tapped Rugg's arm. "We were about to suggest you could probably make Kalamazoo or Battle Creek before nightfall. We happen to know the local hotel is full up."

Rugg started to put his beak into

the beer and that was when the bearded Lem rammed Rugg's elbow. Warm beer sloshed up over Rugg's face, dribbled down his chin and onto his tie. It splashed his shirt front, wetting him to the skin. Lem cackled, got up from the stool, stepped a little behind Rugg. Fat Carter got up, too, backing up Lem.

Rugg mopped the beer out of his eyes with a handkerchief. His movements were deliberate though inwardly he was coming to a boil. He was hot and tired, and he'd been six days on a wild goose chase.

"Lem," he said evenly as he swiveled around and got off the stool, "you shouldn't have done that. Now if the beer had been any good, I wouldn't have minded taking a bath in it. But sink drainage slop like that—"

He paused. Lem had dug down into the pocket of his ragged overalls and produced a plug of tobacco. This he poised on an angular shoulder. His dirty fists were cocked and tiny jet chips of eyes sparked derision.

"You wanna make something out of it, huh?"

RUGG palmed his handkerchief into his right fist, let go a lightning jab that worked off all the nervous strain he had been under looking for—and not finding—Anthony Blossom.

If the blow had been twice as fast he might have caught Lem somewhere in the beard. Lem didn't exactly duck. His departure from the spot of immediate danger was more like a collapse. The force and fury of Rugg's blow carried on and on until what was left of it jabbed fat Mr. Carter right on the button.

That was too bad. Carter's large nose came suddenly into full bloom. Blood was everywhere on the chubby farmer's face. He grabbed at a handful of paper napkins that jutted from a glass on the lunch counter and made an immediate attempt to dam the flood.

As for Rugg, he was taken from behind by big Peevey's looping arms, and Peevey had not wrestled a breaking plow all these years for nothing. The skinny Lem came up from underfoot at the sight of Rugg's shoulder holster showing inside his open coat.

"Got a gun!" Lem shrilled.

And then Rugg didn't have a gun. Lem lifted it, brandished it in a manner that made Rugg cold all over for the first time in four months.

The woman in soiled pink came screaming out of the kitchen and carried her cries for help as far as the screen door. Altogether it was a gay affair with Carter and his nose making Buddy Poppies out of paper napkins and strewing them all over the floor.

With the exception of Carter's nose trouble, Rugg could see where all this could easily be a put-up job; for as soon as Engles' town marshal popped into the lunchroom, friend Peevey began calling this as clear a case of assault as he'd ever laid eyes on. There was no telling where Rugg might have spent the night if it hadn't been for the girl.

The girl alighted from a station wagon that had *Sunny Knoll Orchards* lettered on its door. At the moment she entered the lunchroom, Rugg kicked a pair of handcuffs out of the fingers of the town marshal.

The girl, a tall, slim-hipped figure in a sky blue jumper got herself into the thick of it. She seized the marshal's gold-braided sleeve and hung on. Rugg stopped kicking and relaxed against the broad chest of big Peevey. He took a second glance at the girl.

Her hair was crisp gold, short-bobbed, with just a touch of pink in it, robbed no doubt from the peach bloom of her cheeks. Rugg found himself wishing he was ten years younger, because if he had been eligible to go Jap hunting, this was the lady to write home to.

"Stop it!" she said, hauling on the marshal. "Stop this brawling, Mr. Ivers. You—you've got to help me.

There's a man up at my place, right on top of the knoll. And he—he's dead."

The brawling stopped. Peevey's grip on Rugg relaxed slightly. Silence crowded out everything except the buzz of flies resettling themselves on the screen door. Fat Mr. Carter stopped daubing at his injured nose and looked at Lem. Lem shifted his quid and his jet eyes in Peevey's direction. The girl looked at Rugg, gave him an impersonal appraisal.

"What did he do?" the girl asked, nodding at Rugg.

"Sunny," said Peevey in Rugg's ear, "he assaulted George Carter. Up and slammed him on the nose."

The girl frowned. She stepped over to Carter. Marshal Ivers addressed her.

"Who's this dead man you're talking about, Sunny? You wouldn't be funning me?"

"I wouldn't. And I don't know who he is. Only aren't you supposed to do something about it?" She turned from the marshal to Carter, spoke in a low voice. The marshal picked up his handcuffs and started for Rugg again.

"This time Mr. Rugg ain't going to do any kicking," Lem said, and he bored Rugg's middle with Rugg's own gun.

"Wait a second, Mr. Ivers." It was the girl again. She was standing with one hand resting lightly on the blue sleeve of the injured Carter's shirt. A slight frown troubled her lovely brow. "George hasn't preferred charges yet, has he?"

Technicalities apparently worried the marshal. He tilted his cap and scratched his head. "Not formal. You prefer, don't you?"

"Dough," Carter said, dabbing at his nose.

"Huh?" from the bearded Lem.

"Dough I don't," Carter mumbled. "I guess it wud an accidut. E hid Lemb and Lemb ducked and I wud in the way."

Rugg looked at the girl and smiled.

"Thanks. First time I was ever saved by Pocahontas."

Sunny's lips thinned and her nostrils flared. She tossed her head disdainfully and stalked out of the lunch-room. Rugg wondered if he oughtn't to read the book again—the book about how to make friends. He certainly wasn't the life of the party at Engles.

CHAPTER II

THE dead man lay on his side in the dry brown grass that topped a little hill a mile and a half outside the Engles town limit. His was a small body, narrow through the chest and shoulders. Death had further pinched and pointed the naturally sharp features of his face. His hair had been dyed black in an attempt to conceal the fact that he was past middle age, and the grease he'd used to sleek it now contributed to its stiff, scared cat appearance. Death had not come easily.

The little dead man was not Anthony Blossom. Rugg had never met Anthony Blossom in the flesh and had but a little photographic evidence to go by, but he knew this was not Blossom. The little man had been known as Fred Bracker; he was well known in Detroit for a number of smooth real estate swindles that had brought him afoul of the law.

Peter Rugg reached the spot shortly after Marshal Ivers and Engles' leading physician, a Dr. Hunt, had taken over. The girl named Sunny had done a pretty fair job of spreading the news, for there must have been a dozen or so citizens who had come out from Engles to have a look.

Lem was there, sitting on his heels and sucking on a foul cob pipe. He'd driven up with Mr. Peevey and George Carter. Blood from Carter's nose furnished the only scarlet stains on the scene, for there was no apparent wound or mark on Fred Bracker's body.

Rugg stood a little in the back-

ground, listening to the comments, waiting his chance for a closer look.

"Ain't that the man come out from the city for his health?" somebody asked.

"Sure," big Peevey said. "Fred Bracker. He was rooming with Teach. Got here three-four days ago. What's the cause, Doc Hunt?"

"The heat," Doc Hunt said. "They come out from the city, from air-cooled offices, on vacations. Then they overdo a good thing and wonder when the heat gets them. Heat prostration, I'll put it down as. Ivers, you call Paw Paw and talk to the coroner about the inquest."

Rugg moved in a bit closer, looked over George Carter's shoulder. Doc Hunt had straightened away from the corpse and Marshal Ivers had taken his place to search Fred Bracker's pockets.

Bracker was dressed in a lightweight deep brown suit. The coat and pants were wrinkled, but Rugg noticed particularly the right trouser leg. There most of the wrinkles were horizontal and closely spaced, as though that one pants leg had been rolled thigh high.

"One wallet," Marshal Ivers said, producing a black leather billfold from inside the dead man's coat. "You folks witness what's in this here wallet, so I won't be accused of holding out nothing."

Everybody moved in a little closer. For a moment there was complete silence with the hot westerly sun beating through the still air.

"One identification card," Ivers said. "Name of Fred Bracker and a Detroit address. 'In case of accident notify'—That there is left blank. Guess Mr. Bracker didn't figure on having no accident."

A short, taut laugh from somebody in the group. Ivers opened the bill pocket.

"Here we got three one dollar bills, a twenty, and a check made out to F. C. Bracker—" Ivers paused. He raised the check a little way so that

big Peevey, George Carter, and the squatting Lem could see it. Peter Rugg just glimpsed it before Ivers stuck it back into the wallet.

The check was in the sum of five hundred dollars and had been signed by Anthony Blossom.

"Guess that's everything. Where's Reed Palmer? Ain't here, huh? First time he was ever late to the scene of a prospective customer." Ivers turned to Lem. "Lem Foley, if you're going on home now, you might stop by Sunny's and phone into town for Reed Palmer. Reed can hold the remains in his funeral parlor until we hear from the coroner. Got to be some formalities when a man just drops, even if it is the sun did it."

Lem stood up. He turned his head, took his pipe from his mouth, spat. "Agreeable. I'll get along right now."

INSTEAD of making toward the oiled surface road, the bearded scarecrow took gangling steps along the brow of the hill to follow the shade lent by an apple orchard.

"Have you noticed, Doc Hunt," Peter Rugg said, "the left trouser leg of the dead man seems to have been rolled up?"

Doc Hunt, elderly and plump, took off black-ribboned glasses and squinted gray eyes at Rugg. "It maybe has. Clothes don't come under my department. It's the man under them I take care of."

Big Peevey stared thoughtfully at the corpse. "It has been rolled up. That fits in, don't it? He was out on a walk, got all-fired hot hiking along the road. Came to Black Creek back there"—he jerked his head—"and decided he'd go in wading and cool himself off a bit. Naturally, he'd roll up his pants."

Peter Rugg showed his teeth; it wasn't exactly a smile. "Cranes do it, and herons. But I never saw a man do any one-legged wading."

He turned on his heel and walked to the road where his rattletrap was parked. He didn't get into the car im-

mediately, but walked twenty feet to the east where the road dropped down toward the creek. He stopped, looked back toward the point where Bracker's body had been found, then turned slowly and completely around.

There wasn't a house within sight. Giant hardwood trees formed a solid wall of green growing along the east bank of the stream. He thought it would be possible for anybody to park a car at this point in the road and lug a body up to the brow of that knoll in broad daylight without running much risk of being seen.

Rugg returned to his car, started it, drove west slowly, going toward the county road that ran north and south through the town of Engles. He caught up with the gangling figure of Lem walking along in orchard shade, set his howling brakes, and called above the clatter of his motor:

"How about a lift, Lem?"

The bearded man stopped, turned, stood with one filthy knee cap showing through a tear in his overalls.

"Guess you don't know when you're being ignored," Lem said. Then he set his cob pipe in his teeth and walked on.

Rugg meshed gears and rolled on toward the junction with the county road. There on his left was a white frame filling station, newly painted. There were flower boxes below the windows with flourishing geraniums.

The girl named Sunny was seated on a chair tilted back against the front of the building. She frowned slightly as Rugg pulled up in front of one of the pumps. Rugg turned off his ignition and the girl came forward reluctantly. Rugg noticed that the sky blue of her jumper suit matched the blue of her eyes.

"Four gallons of regular," he said.

She didn't move toward the pump. "Let's see your coupon, please," she said frigidly.

Rugg brought out his "C" book, passed it to her. Her eyes didn't encourage smiles, but he smiled anyway. "Maybe it's something my best friend won't tell me, but why am I so un-

popular around here? The hospitality just isn't Michigan."

She said, "Maybe it's your nose."

He laughed. "I see. They figure it's too long and gets into their business."

"Gets into *our* business," she corrected and went to the pump.

Rugg got out of the car to discover that Sunny could be exquisitely feminine even about a masculine business like pumping gas. He nodded in the direction of the knoll, including the big apple orchard in his glance.

"You don't work all this alone and run the station too?"

She nodded. "I get plenty of help, of course. The Jarvis boys, and sometimes I can get a day's work out of Lem Foley. I've been doing all right, in spite of the fact that my brothers are both in the Marines."

He said, "That's the stuff. Keep the home going 'til the boys get back."

"I intend to." Her jaw set tight.

"Back in town in the lunchroom it didn't take long for Lem, Peevey and Carter to cotton to the fact that my name is Rugg," he said "Wonder how come?"

Her eyes were scornful. "We're not so dumb. Your name is Rugg and you're with a Detroit detective agency. And I guess everybody knows why you're here."

"Because of Anthony Blossom?"

She nodded, lifted the gas-hose nozzle from the mouth of his tank. He said, "I don't get it. What's it to anybody around here?"

SHE said, "Don't make me laugh."

Then she took his money, went into the station. Lem Foley came ambling onto the gravel, gave Rugg a jet-eyed glance, then went into the station after the girl. Rugg watched Lem through the window, saw him go to the phone, evidently to call Engles' undertaker.

Rugg turned to the hood of his car, opened it, bent over the hot engine. He took hold of one of the ignition wires, gave it a yank. The end of the wire was equipped with the old-

fashioned type spade tip that fitted under the spark plug binding post and it snapped free. He lowered the hood, then got back into the car.

Sunny came out with his change as he was making a vain attempt to start the car. She stood back, listening to the grind of the starter, watching him scornfully. Rugg grinned and shook his head.

"The gas is no good." He got out again and raised the hood, pretended to be completely baffled. Sunny came to stand beside him, her golden head close to his shoulder. He said, "I guess I'm stuck here a while, at least until I can get a mechanic out from town."

"Guess again, Mr. Rugg." She turned on her heel, went into the station, came out with a pair of pliers. That is, they appeared to be pliers on first glance. On closer examination Rugg decided they were more like a dentist's forceps, the pincers part hollow ground and curving downward. But he could not conceive of any human being having a large enough mouth to permit the entry of such an instrument.

He watched her connect the wire to the plug and tighten the binding post, then commented on her odd tool.

"These?" She looked down at the big forceps in her hand. "Something a veterinarian uses to pull horses' teeth with, I guess. I found them in the creek yesterday." She started back into the station, but Rugg caught her wrist.

"Wait a minute, Sunny. It was a put-up job, my pulling that wire, but I've got to talk to you. Why did Peevey, Carter, and Lem Foley try to railroad me into the local jug as soon as I hit town? And why did you work your girlish wiles on Carter to keep me out?"

She flushed, tried to jerk away. When he wouldn't let go, she kicked his ankles.

"You know," she said bitterly. Then added in sudden fury, "When you see your boss, you tell him he'll drill for

oil in the middle of my orchard over my dead body!"

She landed a kick that left Rugg hopping on one foot, jerked away from him, ran into the station, ducked past Lem who had concluded his phoning, and disappeared.

Lem came to the door, lounged against the frame, and pointed down the road with his cob pipe. "Get going, Mr. Rugg, and if you want to reach a ripe old age, keep away from Sunny Collins."

When Rugg got back to Engles and the lobby of the Engles Inn with its brown artificial leather furniture, its mahogany finished desk, and dilapidated palms, he discovered why the whole town knew his name and his business. Old Dave Burrin, the boss of Consolidated, had phoned the Engles Inn, leaving a message that Rugg was to call the Detroit office if he stopped there.

Rugg went into the phone booth, called long distance and in a matter of five minutes was put through to Burrin in Detroit.

"I've been trying to get in touch with you for the past three days," Burrin thundered. "You should have called in and made a report, Rugg, and you'd have saved us three days on your swindle sheet. You're to come in and leave the Anthony Blossom business alone."

"You mean they've located Blossom?" Rugg asked.

"I don't know and don't give a damn. All I know is our client said to let the matter drop."

Rugg showed his teeth. "Well, nuts to our client! I'm getting the merry shove-around here at Engles and it's a strictly personal matter that I find out why. Also, something new has been added to. A corpse, Burrin—a man who went wading one-legged."

"Corpse?" came from the receiver. "Not Anthony Blossom?"

"No, not Anthony Blossom," Rugg returned. "A sharp little so-and-so of a land shark, well known to Detroit

cops for playing the three-lot swindle. The name is Fred Bracker."

"Bracker!" Old Burrin practically howled. "Not Fred Bracker?"

"You think not?" Rugg chuckled unpleasantly. He'd never liked any man he'd worked for and Burrin least of all. "A friend of yours, is he?"

"Friend? Hell no, he's no friend! But he is—*was*—a client. He's the man who wanted to find Anthony Blossom!"

CHAPTER III

THE clerk of the Engles Inn leaned across the red mahogany and popped his gum at Peter Rugg. "Well no, Mr. Rugg, I can't say that I know a place in town where a fellow could get a drop of something stronger than beer and sit in on a friendly little game. You know how it is here with local option. But"—he winked—"if maybe you was to stumble in on Irv's place . . ."

Rugg raised chunky brown eyebrows and managed to look pleasantly surprised. "How, may I ask, would one go about stumbling into Irv's place?"

The clerk leaned so far over the desk he nearly fell on his head. Rugg discovered he used breath perfume.

"You go up here to the railroad track and walk left down the right-of-way," the clerk whispered. "By the second block signal, you turn through the thicket and like as not you'll stumble on a shanty the section hands used to have."

"Irv's place?"

"Irv's place. Tell Irv that Johnny sent you."

Rugg nodded. "And you get a rake-off on what I drop in the game." He left the flushing clerk, went out the door, and around the corner to where his car was parked. He had no intention of stumbling into Irv's place, but it was nice to have the gossips of Engles think he was someplace other than where he was going. What he really wanted was a closer look at that

oil derrick which seemed to cast a sinister shadow across the lives of the farmers in and around the town.

It was nine-thirty when he reached the outskirts and got onto the county road that ran by Sunny's filling station. The pumps at the station were unlighted and padlocked for the night. Rugg passed slowly, thinking it would be a fine thing if he was considered nice people and could drop in for a chat with Sunny Collins.

He turned up the oiled side road, went clattering up the hill and down toward the bridge across Black Creek. He was in the middle of the bridge when a shrill feminine cry keened through the soft night sounds.

Rugg braked in the middle of the bridge and killed the motor. The cry came again and from the water upstream the scream sounded once more, accompanied by a frantic splashing of the water.

Rugg jumped out, left his door dangling open. He ran to the end of the bridge, hit a rain-rutted path that sloped steeply and at the same time angled in under overhanging trees. Ahead he could see the stream widening at this point to a good seventy feet.

The moonlit surface was curled to white froth near the bank and a little way out a log some ten feet in length bobbed lazily on small waves. Bubbles broke the surface near the log. At the sight of them Rugg immediately stripped off his coat and kicked off his oxfords.

Knee-deep in arrowhead he stood on the short steep bank and took a long, flat dive to cut deep water eight feet away. He came to the surface. A matter of three powerful strokes took him to the bobbing log and the breaking bubbles.

He took a deep breath, preparatory to going under again, then a gleaming white something broke water to his left—a white bathing cap. Rugg seized the log with one hand, extended the other toward a slim bare arm. The arm and bathing cap ducked under

fast and a head rammed Rugg squarely in the middle.

He gasped, snatched below the surface. An arm lashed upward again and a small fist slammed the Detroit dick across the jaw. He caught the arm, yanked, snatched at the white cap. The bathing cap was old rubber and ripped. Golden hair floated out on the surface like seaweed. Rugg caught a handful, pulled Sunny Collins toward him. She came up sputtering, gasping for breath, and cracked another blow to the side of his face.

"Hey!" he yelled.

She tried to wriggle free. "You—you stool pigeon! You murderer!"

"Cut it!" He tried to get both her shoulders, but that meant letting go of the log. He went under and she kicked to keep him down. He came up again, at least half drowned and this time had sense enough to catch the slender strap that crossed her right shoulder.

"Now," he panted. "Now, you'll be good. You'll have to."

SHE was good. That is, she didn't try to pull away and she didn't make further attempts to drown him. But she was still defiant and there was enough moonlight for him to see the flash of her angry eyes.

"I'm not afraid of you now that I see you," she said. "I'm darned sorry that I gave you the satisfaction of hearing me scream. But there on the bank you were just a ghostly shadow. When you toppled that log over on me while I was floating I was afraid because—because—"

"Whoa there, Sunny," he said levelly. "I've done a lot of mean things like putting mice in the school ma'am's lunch pail, but I got yet to bash out a bathing beauty's brains with a ten foot log."

"Deny it! You would! I suppose you were ten miles away—"

From the depths of the woods on shore came a shot. It chipped the floating log within inches of Rugg's hand. Rugg shoved the heel of his hand into

Sunny's face, forcing her down behind the shelter of the log.

"And stay there, pet," he whispered, "before I hang one on you."

A second shot. The orange-red flame of it first from the darkness, then the whine and splash as it hit the water almost simultaneous with the crack. Rugg pulled his own gun, dripping wet, from the shoulder harness and leveled the barrel over the log. The third shot was so close to Sunny's head that Rugg lost his temper and poured three quick ones in a burst to cover the region marked by the gun flame.

"That'll let him know you're conveyed," he whispered. "Now, let's work this log out into the channel, keeping it broadside toward the shore. Then we'll paddle it downstream and under the bridge."

There were no more shots, but they made their way in cautious silence into the gloom beneath the bridge. There it was shallow enough to wade ashore while the current carried the log on downstream. Rugg hobbled in sock feet up the path, groped in darkness until he found shoes and coat.

"I've got a robe and sneakers back there on the bank somewhere," Sunny said, "but I'm not going back there. And neither are you."

He chuckled, trying to ram wet feet into dry shoes.

She said, "Maybe—*maybe* I'm all wrong about you, Peter Rugg."

He looked at the tall supple figure of her standing there in the moonlight. "Why should you be an exception, Sunny? Everybody's wrong about me. Actually, I have a heart of gold and never beat my old mother on Sundays."

"Just weekdays, huh?" She laughed, started barefooted up the bank ahead of him.

WHEN they reached Rugg's car, he helped her in, gave her his dry coat to put around her shoulders. As he started the car he asked:

"Now what's this about Anthony Blossom drilling for oil on your land?"

She was silent a moment. Then, "You honestly don't know?"

"My cards on the table, Sunny. I have been sent all over Michigan trying to find Anthony Blossom. The guy who wanted to find him was this Fred Bracker you found lying dead up there on the hill. Maybe that's how it works—find Anthony Blossom and you get a sunstroke. Like you take a gander at the Gorgon's head and turn to stone."

He gave her a quick, searching look. "Maybe that's why you nearly got your skull crushed by a log tonight. You know where Anthony is, huh?"

"Why," she replied, "of course." She uttered a short, bitter laugh. "There probably isn't a member of the Fruit Association around here who doesn't know. He's in Lansing. We've all had mail from him."

Rugg sighed. "Then that's not it. You don't know where he is. Because he isn't in Lansing. e's disappeared. What I want to know is about this oil business. I'd like to have a look at that derrick put up back here. I'll have a look, too, soon as I get you home."

Sunny shook her head. "You won't get near that derrick. There's an armed guard around the place all the time. It's right in the middle of Peevey's orchard and not even Mr. Peevey can get near it. The oil riggers claim they are afraid of sabotage, what with the government needing more oil for ships, planes, and tanks."

"Peevey says you can't get near it?"

"No. Anthony Blossom. That is, his oil promotion company. Anthony Blossom has the oil drilling rights on all the land in half the county. It's an easement or something. Seventy-five years ago, most of this fruit farming section was owned by a man named Sanderson. When he sold to the farmers, he reserved oil rights for himself.

"For seventy-five years these farms have been changing hands, passing to new owners, and that retention of oil rights by the Sanderson heirs was just considered a small cloud on the title. Everybody forgot about it. Who would

have thought that Michigan would ever produce any great amount of oil anyway?"

"I see. Now it turns out that Anthony Blossom has bought the oil rights in a lump from the Sanderson heirs. And if he wants to drill a well in the middle of your living room, he can just come on into your house and say, 'Move the piano, sister, I'm going to strike a gusher.'"

"That's about it. And all of us around here could have chipped in fifty or so dollars apiece and got the Sanderson heirs to give us a quit claim deed."

"How much would Blossom want for the same thing?" Rugg asked.

She turned on the lumpy seat cushions and studied him a moment. "That's what everybody thinks you're here to find out. Mr. Peevey says Blossom hired you to come here and find out how much we could afford to pay collectively."

Rugg snorted. "Peevey jumps to a lot of conclusions."

"Well, Mr. Peevey is going to be the hardest hit when it comes to buying out Anthony Blossom's oil drilling rights," she told him. "He's got the most to lose and maybe it does work on his imagination a little."

"What about George Carter and Lem Foley?" Rugg asked.

"Carter only has about forty acres, but he just bought the land about six weeks ago—missing the cloud on the title entirely when the deed was made."

"A fine bunch of lawyers you must have up here. What about Foley?"

"He came up from southern Indiana this spring," Sunny told him. "He bought five acres of berry farm. But it would mean a lot to him if he lost it. Peevey will be the biggest loser, but there are plenty of others—the Holdens, Chris Webb, the Mitchells. I could name a score who will have to scrape together every possible cent to buy Blossom's rights to keep him from wrecking their farms and robbing them of the oil that's there."

"IF IT'S there," Rugg said dryly.

"This could be a piece of legal extortion. Fred Bracker's being on the scene—dead or alive—suggests something crooked. Suppose Bracker heard about Blossom buying the rights from the Sanderson heirs. Suppose Bracker discovered that oil derrick was a phony and there wasn't any oil. He'd like to find Anthony Blossom and get Blossom to cut him in on the deal, wouldn't he? And for his piece of cake, Bracker would agree to keep mum about the hoax."

"Why—why—" Sunny gasped. "But Bracker was working for Blossom. I heard there was a check found on his person—"

"To make it look as though he was working for Blossom," Rugg cut in. "That's just in case somebody might turn up facts proving that Bracker was murdered."

"Don't you see, Sunny, that if Bracker was murdered and everybody around here thought Bracker was working for Blossom, people would lie and cover each other—making such an awful mess of the investigation the killer never would be caught?"

"If Peevey were to kill Anthony Blossom, for instance, or anybody working for Blossom, you wouldn't run to the nearest state trooper and testify, would you? You and your friends are being hurt by a ruthless business man. You'd act collectively to cover up that man's killer, wouldn't you?"

"Maybe you're right, Peter Rugg."

"Sure, I'm right." Rugg turned the rattletrap into a narrow lane beyond Sunny's apple orchard, drove two hundred feet back from the road to the spic-and-span white house Sunny was keeping up until her brothers came back from the war.

She asked Rugg in. He stood dripping on the screened porch while she went inside for robe and slippers. When she had returned to the lamp-light, her face cleanly shining, Rugg became curious about that pair of veterinarian's forceps which she had

used to tighten the binding post on his spark plug that afternoon.

"Oh, there was a whole box of veterinarian's instruments in the river when I went swimming yesterday," she explained. "The sort of thing that the mail order companies sell to farmers—tag and ring crimpers, special knives, and the like. I've got the other things here if you'd like to see them."

Rugg was interested. Medical instruments could be deadly weapons and he didn't think that nice people went around tossing such stuff into country creeks. She brought him the box, a shipping carton of triple-thick cardboard, the outer layer of which still felt soggy. He first examined the box itself. The shipping label had either been removed or the water had softened the glue and washed it away. He looked at the gleaming instruments one at a time, then asked Sunny if she had a mail order catalogue.

She laughed, "Couldn't live without one."

When she had returned with the catalogue, Rugg said, "Could be that your finding this stuff puts you on the spot. Maybe whoever ditched these instruments thinks the label with his name and address on it is still on the box."

Sunny's cheeks paled slightly. "But what does it all mean?"

He shrugged heavy shoulders as he turned to that section of the catalogue devoted to stock farmers' supplies. He found the instrument kit, carefully checked its contents against the gadgets contained in the box Sunny had found. When he looked up, his eyes were grave.

"Something is missing besides those forceps you've got down at the filling station. A forty c.c. hypodermic syringe complete with one needle."

"Is that bad?" Her blue eyes were puzzled.

"That's bad, Sunny. I think you'll have to go into town with me and put up at the hotel. Can't have you out here alone with a murderer running around."

CHAPTER IV

WHEN they reached the Engles Inn thirty minutes later, the lobby was the scene of a small convention. Farmers all, in their Sunday clothes with worry written on their faces, came up from the brown leatherette chairs and from behind the palms. Big Peevey and fat George were among them. They were startled to see Sunny Collins with Peter Rugg.

"You haven't talked, Sunny?" George Carter asked the girl bluntly.

She shook her still damp hair. Peevey came forward and drew Sunny toward him, leaving Rugg alone. Peevey's square cut jaw was grimly set. He looked sore about something, as though maybe Peter Rugg, by his presence, had contaminated Sunny.

Peevey said, "This is how it is, Rugg. You tell Blossom to send us a written statement just how much he expects for those oil rights. We'll take it or leave it. No dickering—"

"He's not working for Anthony Blossom," Sunny interrupted.

"Well he didn't come here just for the fishing!" somebody said.

"For the hunting, boys," Rugg told them. Then he walked over to the desk and told the clerk he wanted a room for Miss Collins. When he turned from the desk, he found Sunny in the middle of the farmers hotly defending Rugg.

The Detroit dick slipped out the side door of the lobby unnoticed, crossed the street, stepped around the corner to the residence and office of Doc Hunt. He went up on the porch, pushed the bell beside the illuminated name plate.

An elderly woman came to the door and asked him to step in. Hunt put in his appearance with one finger tucked into the pages of a book and his be-ribboned glasses astride his nose. He recognized Rugg immediately and frowned.

"Where's Fred Bracker's body?" Rugg asked.

"The coroner released it to Reed

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Palmer, the funeral director," Hunt replied. "Why?"

"Without a post mortem?"

Hunt's scowl deepened and he inflated his chest and, at the same time, his ego. "In forty years no one has so questioned my veracity. Bracker's death was due to heat prostration and was so reported."

Rugg showed his teeth. "Not in forty years, huh? You mean you haven't made a mistake in forty years? Then you won't want to start making them now. You'd better come along with me for another look at the body."

The glasses on Hunt's nose trembled. "I have *looked*—as you say—at the body. And I wish you a very good evening, sir."

The doctor led Rugg to the door, opened the screen for him, turned, took a quick, shallow breath and held it. Rugg's gun muzzle was close over the region of the doctor's appendix.

"Doc," Rugg warned him, "I am a desperate man. If Fred Bracker could go in wading on one leg, I'm losing my mind. So I've got to know the truth. Am I nuts or not? You've got to help me find myself."

"This—this is preposterous!"

"Also urgent. Let's go, Doc. ~~N~~ever mind getting your hat—and maybe some reinforcements."

THEY went out into the hot sultry night and back onto the main drag. People were just coming out of the town's only movie house, and Rugg put his gun under cover but kept a tight grip on Hunt's arm. Past the movie house a couple of doors was Palmer's furniture store.

The front door was locked, but there was a light somewhere in the back. Rugg led the doctor around to the rear door, knocked. A tall gray man with blue elastic arm bands holding up his shirt sleeves, came to the door.

"Reed, this—this madman has a gun—" Dr. Hunt began.

Rugg said, "I'll talk, Doc. Mr. Palmer, we are old friends of Fred

Bracker. We'd like to shed a silent tear over the remains."

Palmer bowed them in. He had deep wrinkles like gutters in his cheeks. "A funny thing," he said in a shrill voice that was out of keeping with his solemn face, "I just was saying to myself, 'I wonder if Doc Hunt noticed that?' Then I decided sure you had."

Rugg nudged Dr. Hunt forward. "Did you notice it?"

"I haven't the slightest idea what you are talking about."

Rugg chuckled. "Neither have I. What's so funny about the corpse, Mr. Palmer?"

"Piece of string," said Palmer. "In his mouth. Funny string. Black and hard like it was dipped in creosote. Front teeth were nicked, too, like he'd been biting threads. I remember when Miss Pinnard, the local seamstress passed away, her teeth were like that."

Palmer led them into his stock room where crated furniture and caskets crowded the corners. In the center of the room was a long wood table with a light suspended over it, and on the table was Fred Bracker's sheeted form. Fred Bracker's suit, now neatly pressed, hung on a hanger hooked to the corner of a crate.

Reed Palmer reached out ~~thin~~ crooked fingers toward the same ~~crate~~, picked up something which he ~~started~~ to pass to Doc Hunt. Rugg snatched the something, held it beneath the light.

Palmer had said about all there was to say about it. It was a piece of stout cotton cord about an inch in length, ends frayed. It was black and quite stiff, for it had been coated with creosote or some other preservative.

"In his mouth, huh?" Rugg muttered. "As though he'd been tied with creosoted cord and tried to gnaw himself to freedom."

"Come now," the doctor said, "that's jumping at a lot of conclusions."

"All right," Rugg returned crossly. "So he lost his ration book and was reduced to eating string! Let's see Bracker's right leg, Mr. Palmer."

The undertaker pulled back the sheet and Rugg bent over the scrawny leg for a moment. Then he pointed to a small red mark in the side of the calf and turned to the doctor.

"That a chigger bite, or a hypo needle puncture?"

"Let's see." Hunt's curiosity was getting the better of his personal dislike for Rugg. He pinched and prodded at the dead man's leg for a moment. "If that was an insect bite, the inflammation should have disappeared this long after death. There is a hypo puncture there, Mr. Rugg, which still would not account for the inflammation unless—"

"It's murder, isn't it?" Rugg said. "The killer got a mail order instrument kit, just to get his hands on a hypo syringe. He tied up Bracker, rolled up one pants leg—remember—pumped poison into him, then carried him to that knoll and dumped him."

"There are no marks to indicate that the man has been tied," Doc Hunt muttered.

"There wouldn't be much of that sort of thing if he was tied the way I think he was," Rugg mused. "But what about the poison? What could so closely approach the symptoms of heat prostration that you'd be fooled, Doc?"

HUNT straightened away from the corpse. He was gnawing his lower lip and scowling thoughtfully. "Certain vaccines injected intravenously will produce a thermal condition that resembles heat prostration."

"Anything else?" Rugg asked impatiently. "A layman would have a little trouble getting such vaccines."

"True, true." Hunt's eyes sharpened on Rugg. "Look here, you are not accusing me?"

"No. But you couldn't have done a much better job than this, could you? Anything besides vaccines that could do the work?"

"The aniline dyes produce similar reactions," Hunt said. "Probably the most easily obtained thing for the pur-

pose would be ordinary mercurochrome."

Palmer said, "You mean the red stuff you put on scratches? Gosh, Doc, I been using that stuff for years. Wonder I ain't dead!"

"We're not talking about daubing the stuff on a wound," Rugg said. "We mean injecting quite a large amount of mercurochrome into a vein. How about it, Doc? Could it be done with a forty c.c hypo syringe like the veterinarians use on livestock?"

"I would say so. And of course that red mark around the puncture could actually be mercurochrome stain." Hunt took off his glasses and his hand, as he mopped his perspiring brow, trembled a little. "I think it may be necessary to talk further about this with the county coroner. I was perhaps a little hasty in my judgment, but it seemed so obviously a case of heat prostration, especially in weather like this."

"Cheer up," Rugg said. "What's one mistake in forty years, Doc?" Then he left doctor, undertaker, and dead man to walk back onto the main street and head toward the railroad tracks. There was just one more point to check on before he started a little shove-around of his own.

He walked to the left when he reached the Pere Marquette right-of-way, stepping from tie to tie. When he had passed the second signal—a distance of about the length of a city block—he turned off the tracks and into the undergrowth. A faint yellow light gleamed through the branches.

No woodsman, he made a good deal of noise approaching Irv's place. Mosquitoes swarmed around him like a hundred housewives after a single steak. Batting at the bugs, he tripped over a stump and crashed headlong into brambles.

When he was on his feet again, the door of the little shanty ahead was open, silhouetting a tall broad figure of a man. Light from within gleamed on gun metal in the man's hand.

"Irv?" Rugg called.

"Who wants to know?" came gruffly from the shanty.

"Johnny sent me." Rugg stumbled forward until he was within four feet of the door. His passage was blocked by the big man with the gun, but he could nevertheless see a portion of the interior.

Six men, old timers, all of them, were seated at a round table. There were cards and chips and a couple of bottles of illegal liquor. One of the men was the black-bearded Lem Foley. The others appeared to be old toppers, the human dregs of Engles.

Lem leaned far over the table to see around Irv. "Johnny never sent him, Irv," he said. "That's the snoop who works for Blossom. Tried to worm his way in by buying us beer. Tried to set himself right with Sunny Collins."

"Throw the snoop out, Irv," another man shouted. "He'll squeal. You see if he don't."

Irv came off the step, closed the door behind him, took a stride that brought him close to Rugg.

"Listen, brother," he said, "I'd advise you to get the hell out of this town. Somebody's going to get his neck broke, and it could just as well be you."

Rugg said, "All I wanted to do was lose a couple of yards in your game. If you want to get exclusive and rob yourself, I know others who'll take my dough." He backed a step, turned, started back toward the right-of-way.

"Now," Irv said, "you're wising up to yourself."

Irv stood there watching and Rugg kept walking to turn onto the right-of-way and head back the way he had come. He had gone perhaps a hundred feet beyond the block signal when a man stepped out from between box cars along the siding. He carried an electric torch which he beamed directly into Rugg's eyes.

"Whatcha doin' here, bum?"

Rugg stopped. He hadn't counted on anything like this. Light from the torch showed him little of the man ex-

cept that he wore whipcord breeches and laced leather boots.

Rugg said, "Who's asking?"

"Railroad dick. This here is railroad property."

"What line?" Rugg asked. The man was dressed a lot more like an oil rigger than one of the railroad employees.

"None of your lip now!"

The man came at Rugg brandishing a club. Rugg back-stepped, got his gun clear of leather just as the club cracked down to his wrist. His weapon went spinning from the tips of his fingers to hit the gravel of the road bed.

He threw up his left arm to ward off another blow from the club, and at the same time lashed out with an unfeeling right hand. The man with the club stumbled back against the side of the box car, bounced, and suddenly there were two booted men with clubs working on Peter Rugg.

He was never quite sure where the second man came from, but the attack came from the rear and Rugg went down under a flurry of flying clubs. At least half of the fighting world came tumbling down on top of him. After that was the darkness and silence.

Later, he dreamed somebody was kicking him. Somebody was.

CHAPTER V

AN ELECTRIC lantern, swaying slightly, held him fascinated when he opened his eyes. Rugg was conscious of continuous motion and a great deal of noise. Somebody kicked him again and the lantern danced. Rugg got his gaze away from the spot of illumination, stared out at a moving vista—through the open door of a box car.

"Wake up, bum. Come on. No free rides on this train."

Rugg sat up. His head pounded. He stared at the freight car brakeman and the swinging lantern.

"How long—how far out of Engles are we?" he demanded.

"Two, maybe three miles. Come on,

fellow. You're shoving out of here."

Rugg stood up, swaying. The brakeman gripped his arm, urged him toward the open door. The train wasn't moving very fast; it just seemed to be standing still with all the earth revolving slowly about it.

Rugg said, "I was shanghaied—" Not that it mattered to the brakeman.

"Go on, buddy. You want help from a boot?"

Rugg jumped clear of the moving cars, hit steep grading, body limp, to roll loose-jointedly down the slope. Hitting the ground was like wrestling a pile driver. Pain racked him from head to toes. He picked himself up slowly, looked up at the roaring, rattling shadow of the train.

He looked at his watch. It was three A.M., still dark, and a little bit cooler. He climbed tiredly up the grade as soon as the cars were past, and started walking along the track in the opposite direction.

Three A.M. He'd been four hours out of the picture. Everything could have happened in that time. This was Anthony Blossom's work. Blossom had ordered his oil riggers to get Rugg out of town. Blossom was missing and he wanted to stay that way until his dirty work was done. He'd killed Fred Bracker because Bracker had found him; because Bracker was in a good position to queer Blossom's game, unless Blossom cut Bracker in on the deal.

Blossom, Rugg decided, was a dirty so-and-so and he'd better stay missing. Because when Peter Rugg, and possibly some others found him, Blossom was apt to get picked.

Three A.M. Four hours out of the picture—what might have happened to Sunny Collins during that time?

He tried "scout pace" along the tracks—fifty paces at a walk and fifty paces at a run. Thirty minutes—like thirty years—dragged by before it occurred to him that he might be running in the wrong direction. The thought was sickening, but he honestly had no way of knowing which di-

rection from Engles the freight train had been going.

He had reached that frantic stage where he was about to turn around and run in the other direction when he came upon what might have been a landmark—a block signal with a scarcely discernible path leading into a thicket. The path leading toward Irv's place?

He ran the next hundred paces, heart pounding against his ribs, mouth open and gasping, then sighted up ahead the watchman's shanty at the intersection with Engles' main street. And to his right bulked the squarish building that was the fruit exchange.

DOWN Engles' deserted street he raced and through the doors of the Engles Inn. Johnny, the night clerk, came out of a nap behind the desk and whammed the call bell in front of him. He looked foolish. Then, as he came thoroughly awake, he called up a smart-aleck grin.

"The play's rough at Irv's place, huh, Mr. Rugg?"

Rugg said, "Where's Miss Collins? She hasn't left? Phone her room."

Johnny got the smirk off his face and went to the two-by-four switchboard.

"She answer?" Rugg panted.

"Give her time, give her time." Johnny rang again and again, then turned to Rugg, his face blank. "Must've slipped out while I was grabbing a wink."

Rugg was on his way before the clerk had completed the sentence. Out in the street, he hopped into his jalopy, got it going. He raced down the street and out onto the county road with the cool air of the new morning whipping about his aching head.

At the mouth of Sunny's lane, he turned off the road, accelerated up to the neat white house. The place was dark. No amount of hammering aroused Sunny Collins.

He returned to the car, backed the length of the lane. At the intersection with the oiled side road, he turned to

the left, kept going for a hundred yards until his dingy headlights picked out a group of three mailboxes. The box that hung by one bolt, more or less, had the name *Lem Foley* lettered on the side.

He spurted on, turned his car off the road, got out, and ran back to the mailboxes. A rutted wagon track wound away from Foley's box to a shanty two hundred feet back from the road. A touring car, almost as old as Rugg's, was parked beside the shanty. There was a faint show of light at the side of a drawn window blind in the house.

Quietly, Rugg made his way up the wagon ruts toward the shanty. Soundlessly, he climbed three sagging steps to the weathered door. Listening at the panel, he could hear footsteps and the excited hammer of his own heart. The footsteps stopped. Rugg stooped, squinted through the keyhole—and saw Sunny.

She was lying on a leather-covered rolled back couch, her slim length securely tied in a black net—a weather-proofed tennis net. In this manner, Fred Bracker had been tied, held helpless in the net until the injection of mercurochrome had taken effect, simulating sunstroke. Bracker had managed to gnaw through one of the treated cords before he had lost consciousness, carrying that piece of cord with him into death.

IF THERE had been any doubt in Rugg's mind, the tennis net cinched it. Lem Foley, the disreputable old man who had purchased this berry patch was Anthony Blossom.

Doubtless when he had realized that he would have to get rid of Fred Bracker, he had picked up the tennis net at his home in Lansing, during one of those trips back which he must have taken in order to have a Lansing postmark on his letters to the fruit farmers. The net would hold Bracker securely until the injection had done its work, Blossom had reasoned; yet it would not leave telltale marks on the

body to indicate that Bracker had been bound.

In pulling this vanishing act, Blossom had decided upon a disguise that would be in every way the direct opposite of the supposed character of Anthony Blossom. Because Blossom had lectured on the tobacco evil Lem Foley both smoked and chewed. Because Blossom had supported prohibition, Lem would be a heavy drinker. Because Blossom had opposed gambling, Lem Foley would play poker at Irv's place.

Sunny raised her eyelids. Her blue eyes rolled frantically in an effort to see through the net that enveloped her, to see what was going on at the other end of the room. Rugg heard footsteps again.

Sunny was conscious, but Rugg had no way of knowing that the injection had not already been made. How long would it be before the mercurochrome would take effect? In Blossom's mind, Sunny's death must be imperative. He had thought that her finding of the veterinarian's instruments in the creek had marked him or his alter-ego as a murderer. Now there was no thinking about it—she *knew* Foley was Bracker's killer.

Rugg backed off the steps, hunched his shoulders, and charged the door. The ancient door and its flimsy lock strained, shattered under the impact. Rugg came crushing into the room, somehow kept his footing, swung around.

At the end of the room in front of a roughly built kitchen cabinet, stood the gangling figure of the man who had called himself Lem Foley. A huge hypodermic syringe and a bottle of mercurochrome tumbled from Foley's fingers.

Foley lunged to the left, with all the agile speed of a crack tennis player trying a backhand shot. From somewhere on the top of the cabinet, he swept up a heavy revolver, swung it around—but not quite in time.

Rugg was in close. He batted at Foley's gun with his open hand. The

revolver blasted near enough to Rugg's face for him to feel the scorch of the powder. Then Rugg had Foley's dirty wrist thrust down and out. Foley's elbow hit the edge of the cabinet with bone-shattering force. Foley's gun hit the floor.

For a skinny man past middle age, Foley had plenty of fight. He plowed into Rugg, both arms working like windmill blades, but his desperation blinded him. Rugg sneaked in a right that rocked Foley's head back. On the return, Rugg snatched Foley's black beard. The beard was real enough—he'd had a good three months to grow it in—and a yank on it jerked Foley's head into the path of Rugg's fist.

That was the blow that did the trick. Foley clattered to the floor like a bag of dry sticks, lay there panting with his eyes glazed and rolled back. Then Peter Rugg stooped for the revolver.

SECONDS later he was holding Sunny in his arms and she was crying. Through her sobs she tried to tell him that Lem Foley was really Blossom; he'd bragged to her about it.

Not even the oil riggers who worked for Blossom had ever penetrated the disguise. He'd bossed the oil derrick crew by phone. They had never guessed that Blossom's voice was coming to them out of Lem Foley's beard.

"Bracker was the only one," she said, "who penetrated the disguise. Bracker and Blossom had worked together before on business deals."

"On swindles," Rugg corrected. "And Bracker must have discovered that Blossom had bought over the oil rights. He wanted to find Blossom and get in on the deal, even going so far as to hire Consolidated to try and find Blossom. When Bracker saw through the Foley disguise, he phoned my office to have them call me off the case; because if I found out what Blossom was up to it would have wrecked everything."

"Bracker, of course, was wrecked anyway, because Blossom wasn't going to cut him in on the deal. And he

wasn't paying hush money either. He killed Bracker and took him up there on the knoll—"

"I wonder if he'd have put me on the knoll?" Sunny said with a shudder. "I almost deserved not to get out of the fix I was in. Foley came to the hotel for me, right up to the room. He said if I'd come with him, he'd show me that you were working for Blossom."

Rugg smiled. "And that was bait enough, huh?"

Sunny flushed. "It was terrible, going into the house and having that net fall on me. And then he said we'd have to wait a while, because he couldn't have me dying of sunstroke in the moonlight."

"And he kept boasting. He said the oil derrick was a fake just to hike the price of the oil rights. Do you know, Peter, how much the farmers in this county had raised to buy out those oil rights?"

"Think you can trust me?"

"Nearly a hundred thousand dollars, just to offer Blossom for a quit claim deed."

Rugg nodded. "And because he hadn't the slightest idea how much he could stick you farmers for and expect to collect, Blossom got the idea of moving into the community last spring, disguised. Buying five acres of berry farm gave him the right to sit in on the fruit growers' meetings. That way, he found out how much the farmers could raise in cash."

When Rugg went back to the Engles Inn, there was a telegram waiting for him from old Burrin, the boss of Detroit's Consolidated Agency. It read:

YOU WERE CALLED OFF CASE. WILL
NOT DEFRAY EXPENSES INCURRED
AFTER FOUR PM YESTERDAY.

BURRIN

Rugg wired right back:

DEFRAYING OWN EXPENSES. MET
GIRL WHO GROWS APPLES. ALWAYS
A SUCKER FOR APPLES.

RUGG

Tune in on Death

By Greta Bardet



The man who ran the Daydream Hour on Station WDAW would never dream again. For an unknown radio censor had granted him an audition at the Pearly Gates—with two bullets in his corpse. And the returning footsteps of the slayer were scheduling the Nightmare Hour on a bloody crimson network.

I OPENED the door to studio eleven and walked in. When I saw the body on the floor, I let out a blood-curdling yell and ran out again. I ran so hard to Miss Kipps, the receptionist for the second floor, I slammed into the desk.

"Is our desk in your way?" she asked sweetly, while I got my breath back. For a beautiful redhead Miss Kipps is a pain.

"Excuse me," I gasped, "but there's

a dead man in studio eleven."

"Oh, sure," she said and kept on chewing her gum. She rustled crisp papers in her fingers, showing that she wished to terminate this intrusion.

I begged, I pleaded with her to let me use the studio phone on her desk. But she would not let me. She thought it was a gag. Finally I had to dig down and use my carfare home on the pay phone. When she saw me dash for the booth, she stopped chewing gum to watch me.

I dialed Police Headquarters. I reported the dead man in studio eleven. They told me not to touch anything. What did they think I do, play with corpses?

When I came out, Miss Kipps said, "Is this onna level?"

"Of course it's on the level!" I yelled because I was excited. "He's lying there in a puddle of blood—uh—" I covered my mouth with my hand. "I wonder who he is?"

"I don't believe it!" announced Miss Kipps indignantly. "If this is another one of your jokes, I'm gonna have Mr. Underwood fire you. So help me!" she added with feeling.

"It's not a joke! You don't suppose it's Mr. Dartnell, do you?"

In a huff, she rose from her throne. "Mr. Dartnell, indeed!"

"Well, it's his studio, isn't it? He was in there before. He sent me for cigarettes. I didn't stop to look at the dead man. All I could see was that blood. Ugh!"

Miss Kipps stopped chewing gum for a minute, a sign that she is mentally occupied. She stamped her foot. "Elmer Lingenhoffer, if this is a gag, I'll suhmash you!"

Studio eleven was Mr. Dartnell's studio. Willard Dartnell, the man behind the turntable of *Your Daydream Hour*. A little gas, a lot of commercials, and recordings of any type, by requests made to Station WDAW.

"How do you know he's dead?" asked Miss Kipps.

"I don't know!" I answered.

"Aw nuts!" she said and rushed

headlong into the fateful studio. I guess she just didn't believe me. Stepping boldly into the studio, she took three steps and froze. She made a gurgling sound and melted floorward. I caught her dexterously and let her ease to the floor.

AT THAT moment the police charged in. They took in the situation with one glance. "Who are you?" asked the one with the frozen eyes. He looked at Miss Kipps; the corpse.

"Two of them!" he said with finality.

"No," I said, "the one with the blood on is the dead one. This is Miss Kipps, thoroughly unconscious for a change."

The detectives were all big men. They stepped over Miss Kipps to get to the corpse. I felt a little sick though. I tried not to look at the dead man, but somehow I was looking.

The detective turned him over a little. I saw that indeed it was Mr. Dartnell.

"Shot!" barked the detective. "Twice. Head and breadbasket." And he let Mr. Dartnell drop. I tried to suppress a convulsive shudder, but it vibrated up my spine in spite of me.

"No gun around," said the detective, "so this is murder!"

Miss Kipps came to just then. She sat up and pointed a finger at me. "Why didn't you tell me he was dead?" she screamed.

Sometimes I think women are completely nuts!

The detectives questioned me at length. I told them how I happened to find him dead.

"Mr. Dartnell buzzed for me," I told them. "I'm the glorified bellhop around here."

"Why glorified?" asked Frozen-eyes.

"Why not?" I shrugged. "He asked me to get him a pack of cigs. He gave me a dollar bill. I hurried downstairs in my usual efficient manner. But the guy at the cigar stand never heard of that brand. He insisted I had misun-

derstood Mr. Dartnell, because Mr. Dartnell smokes Mings. And since Mings doesn't sound like Petty Kings, which is the brand Mr. Dartnell named, and I didn't wish to risk Mr. Dartnell's displeasure, I came back. After all, he might be changing brands.

"I hurried upstairs to confirm the tobaccoist's observation. I ran into the studio and found the dead man. Then I ran outside," and here I let a withering glare fall upon Miss Kipps, "and after a *slight delay*, I managed to call you."

Miss Kipps paled. She not only stopped chewing her gum, I think she swallowed it.

"What d'ya mean, 'slight delay'?" asked the detective as I expected he would.

"Miss Kipps refused me the use of the studio phone."

The detectives turned to her.

"But I—but I thought he was kid-din'." Then it was her turn to bestow me with a withering glare. "Elmer Lingenhoffer, I'll kill you for this!"

"Like you killed Mr. Dartnell, huh?" said a detective.

"Trying to stall for time," said another, "while your accomplice tries to hide the body?"

The moment I was allowed to leave, I headed for Mr. Underwood's office. He's my boss, the president and owner of Station WDAW. But before I got to him, I ran into Nora Jocelyn.

Now most of the female emoters and songstresses around our modest little broadcaster are pretty all around lovelies. But Nora Jocelyn puts them all in the shade. She's a newcomer, has a fifteen minute spot, and is gradually getting on very well. I understand the bigger networks are waiting for her contract to expire with WDAW. I am quite sure she is too.

"Mister Lingenhoffer," she said, and her big blue eyes looked so sad and bewildered my heart went out to her. "Tell me—it's going the rounds of the studio—is it true about Mr. Dartnell?"

I nodded. "It's true. He was murdered. I found him in that condition."

She became covered with consternation. On her it looks good. "How bravely you take it. What a shock it must have been for you to find him like that."

"Yeah," I sighed, enjoying every minute of my proximity to her.

Her lovely blue eyes softened. Somehow she drifted close to me. Softly she said, "Elmer—I'm in a terrible jam—I need your help."

"Do you?" I asked dreamily.

"Would you do something for me, Elmer, something—wrong?"

"Just ask me . . ."

She pushed her finger on one of the buttons of my uniform. It gave me goose pimples. "There's a record on the recording rack—of studio eleven—you must find it for me—and destroy it . . ."

"What kind of a record?"

"Phonograph. It's among those Dartnell was going to play over the air tonight. It's *Hide My Heart*, privately recorded. Can you remember that, Elmer?"

"Sure, Miss Jocelyn."

"Please call me Nora. Find it before the police, or anyone for that matter, finds it. And if you're caught taking it away, promise me you'll smash it to bits. No one must ever hear it, you understand?"

"Gee, sure, Nora."

"If you do this for me, I'll give you ten dollars."

"Gee, no thanks, Nora. I couldn't take your money. But if you'd care to show your appreciation by letting me take you to dinner some night soon?"

"Why Elmer! I'd love it!" she said.

We parted the best of friends.

THE moment I was not under the overpowering influence of her extremely beautiful presence, I said to myself, "What am I saying?"

I remembered. Nora Jocelyn and Dartnell hated each other. A bitter feud, it was too, keeping things lively around the studio. Here I had bliss-

fully promised to remove a record, evidence maybe, from the scene of a crime. Maybe beautiful Nora hated Dartnell enough to—no! I'm a louse ever to think for one moment that Nora would do anything like *that*!

I entered Mr. Underwood's office. He was talking on the telephone. ". . . of course Madame . . . we'll be happy to play the request . . . if you remember, I told you last week that . . . oh, I see . . . Yes, we'll mention your name . . . thank you for calling me."

He hung up. He looked tired. "Don't you knock before you come into offices? The police have just informed me of Mr. Dartnell's tragic end. I understand you found him." He shook his head. "Now, who the hell would want to murder that obnoxious little fuddy-duddy? Wasn't you, was it?"

"No sir. But the police are questioning Miss Kipps about it."

"Miss Kipps? That gum-chewing void? Why should she wish to murder that nonentity?"

"I don't think she did. She and Mr. Dartnell were very good friends."

"Friends of a feather—what do you want?"

I shifted weight. "Well, sir, I was wondering—"

"If it's for a raise in salary, take it up with the OPA. They might consider it, but I won't."

"I don't want a raise, Mr. Underwood, I just—well . . ."

"Stop drooling and come to the point!"

"I was thinking, now that Mr. Dartnell's dead and all— Could I have his job, please?"

His mouth popped open, snapped shut. Then he exploded. "Why, you upstart! You miserable little vulture! You take—why you can't even read the script, no less keep the recordings straight!"

"I could too, Mr. Underwood. If a dope like Mr. Dartnell could do it—why, even Miss Kipps could do it, let alone me!"

"And I suppose," he said icily, "you

consider yourself mentally superior to Miss Kipps?"

"Well, who isn't? Besides, the program goes on this evening. Who's going to play it?"

"I could do it myself, if I didn't have such a pipsqueak voice." He drummed chubby fingers on the blotter. "You have any mike experience?"

"Oh yes," I lied, "Yes, Mr. Underwood, I have."

"Well—" he sighed. "I don't know. One's as good as the other. I suppose you don't need any special talent to play a record. But there are seven commercials, plus blah-blah about the recordings. Think you can do it, Elmer?"

"You bet I can, Mr. Underwood!"

"We'll see. In the meantime if you've a moment to spare, run downstairs into the script files and bring me a few back copies of *Dotty's Dilemma*."

"Yes sir, Mr. Underwood."

"I'll let you know about the program."

I hurried away before he cancelled the promise.

I was elated. I jumped up and clicked my heels all the way through the outer office.

I hurried to the second floor. I wanted to tell Miss Kipps, anybody, everybody. Miss Kipps was at her desk all right, but she was sniffing. Nora Jocelyn was there—and boy, did I want to tell her! But there were too many cops around.

Miss Kipps was talking to Frozen-eyes. "But I can't think, Mr. Whitey. Just about everybody in the world passes by my desk at some time or another. Most of them don't pay any attention to me. The studio people, I mean, except Mr. Dartnell. I'm just here for strangers, really, to say what studio they should go in."

DETECTIVE WHITEY found me in the crowd. He said, "Hey, Elmer, was Miss Kipps at her desk when you came and went out of studio eleven four times?"

"Yes sir. She was here every time."

"I didn't see anybody go in the studio but Elmer," Kipps said, "But I do know that Nora Jocelyn was in there with Mr. Dartnell."

There was a shocked gasp from Nora. "Why, that's not so!" she cried out. "I wasn't near studio eleven today."

"But I heard your name mentioned, Nora. Mr. Dartnell said it, like he was talking to you."

"Oh, darling, you're making a mistake," Nora insisted. "Perhaps he was talking about me, but he wasn't talking to me."

"Well," Miss Kipps shook her head and sighed, "whoever it was, he sure was angry with that person, because he kept shouting, 'Why should it matter? Why should it be important?'"

Detective Whitey looked at her. "The studio is soundproof, how could you hear?"

"I don't know," said Miss Kipps wide-eyed. "Unless the studio door was open."

He turned to Nora. "I understand, Miss Jocelyn, that you disliked Mr. Dartnell."

"That's true," she admitted. "He was very envious of my success. The *Daydream* used to be the favorite hour around here. Now mine is. He disliked me so much, he point-blank refused to play any of my records on his program."

That didn't make sense to me. If he had refused to play her recordings, why was one now on the rack? And why did Nora want it back so badly?

But I had to go to the script room. I left them and ran downstairs to the basement.

The script room is a fairly large room, with nothing but files. Row upon row of square green soldiers. I snapped on the light, and hurried over to the D's, looking for *Dotty's Dilemma*.

Then suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I caught sight of a shadow moving, between the E and F files. I was alone no longer. Something told

me this was going to have a negative influence upon my immediate future.

"Don't move!" said a voice, and the shadow took on a body, jumped; I felt the gun pressed against my ribs.

"One move and I'll drill ye," said the guy, and I wanted to laugh, because it sounded so phony! Only I didn't, because he turned around to face me, and that gun in his hands was the real McCoy. I didn't laugh. In fact I was scared to death.

I noticed, though, that the man was tall and thin. He had a large black handkerchief tied around his face. He wore gloves. A long black overcoat concealed his clothing.

He punched his fist against my shoulder. I slapped hard back against the files.

"Okay," he said, "let's have it."

I swallowed, oiling my throat. "Yes, sir."

"So give!" he ordered. "I don't want to have to drill you, and look for it myself."

"Neither do I," I said unsteadily. "My wallet's on the left, but there isn't any money in it. All I have is—"

"Wise guy, huh? I don't want your dough and you know it. Just hand over the note Dartnell give you when he sent you out for them butts!"

That so astonished me, I got my voice back. "He didn't give me any note. Just money for the butts!"

"Come again, y'little squirt! I happen to know he give you a note!"

"But he didn't! I swear he didn't!"

The guy hefted his gun. I got the idea. "If you just hand over the note," he said, "I'll make a fifty buck deal with you."

"And I can use the money. I'm taking Miss Jocelyn out to dinner. But Dartnell didn't give me any note."

"I see I ain't gettin' no place fast!"

NEXT thing I know I am the recipient of a crack in the face that sent me and my senses reeling between the D and E files. My head crashed into one of them and I hit the floor. I turned my head to see his

shoes standing close to my face. I remember seeing the trouser cuffs were of dark material and had faint pin stripes. My eyesight blurred, my head felt cracked open, and a funny dull pain seemed to grow out of the pit of my nose. That's all I remember.

Then somebody was shaking me. It was Joe the porter.

"Wake up, Elmu," he said. "Y'aint 'loud to sleep 'round here! Now, git up, son, git up." He helped me to my feet, and as I swayed against the files, he cried out. "Lawsamassy! You is drunk. Good thing I come a'runnin' when I hear the racket."

Then I thought that maybe I had missed the *Daydream Hour*, and so I hurried away. I tried to clear the fog out of my head. The dizziness left me by the time I got to the stairs. But up on the second floor, it seemed to crowd around me again.

I ran into the corridor. There was a crowd around the reception desk, but all I could see was Mr. Underwood's rotund figure. I made a sort of a leaping dash for him. Somehow the dizziness overpowered me and my knees seemed to melt. I reached out and managed to catch hold of Mr. Underwood's trouser belt. I got my hands around it and hung on.

"The program," I said, "can I still do the program?"

The trousers were gradually slipping down around Mr. Underwood's ample stomach. Frantically he clutched their sides.

"You don't have to get down on your knees to me," he roared. "You're going on the air! Will you please let go my pants!"

Frozen-eyes got hold of me and set me on my feet. "This guy's hurt, can't you see?"

So while they plied me with smelling salts and felt around my cranium, I told them about my encounter in the filing room. I couldn't identify the man. I went through my pockets, but nothing was missing. I swore that Mr. Dartnell hadn't given me a note with the money. If he had, I must have

dropped it. The detectives had found no note in the studio.

When that was all settled, Mr. Underwood asked if I'd managed to get the *Dolly* scripts. I said no, but I'd go back and get them if he liked.

"Never mind," he said, "I'll let Miss Kipps get them. If somebody hits her over the head, it won't matter!"

Miss Kipps didn't get it. She ran away, blissfully happy to be of service to the president of our little radio station. A couple of burly guys going with her, of course.

Mr. Underwood took me by the arm and led me into studio eleven. At the announcer's desk, he handed me the script. The turntables were to the left of me, the rack of records to the right, arranged in the order of which they were to be played.

While he explained to me the routine of which I was already familiar, someone entered the studio. It was Rodney Black, the control engineer. He walked through the studio to the control room and my heart stood still.

Mr. Black was wearing a dark pin-striped suit. He was also tall and thin. I just stared at him for a moment, but not too long. Naturally, lots of men wear pin-striped suits, and I hardly could go up to him and say he was the man who had assaulted me. But that tight glitter in his eyes as he looked at me! And I couldn't remember whether I had told the police about seeing the cuffs of my assailant's trousers. There was nothing to do but sit tight, keep my mouth shut until I had better proof.

But why Rodney Black, the control engineer, had wanted that note, or why he should kill Mr. Dartnell, if he did, I don't know.

MR. UNDERWOOD explained how I must read the script between recordings, when to put in the spot commercials. It was a half hour program. He warned me that if I got as much as one record wrong, he'd fire me.

This rehearsal was for timing of

the records and script. Mr. Underwood signalled Mr. Black, now seated at the controls, and I began.

I was very nervous. I was sweating and trembling, but somehow I managed it. The first record was *Tonight We Love*, requested by a woman in New Jersey. It went off without a hitch.

While it played I glanced over the rest of the script. The next was to be *Far Off India*, after that *The Rock of Ages*, *Away Out on a Mountain*, *One in a Million*, ending with two parts of *Thirty-two Variations on a Theme* by Bach.

Naturally, I was thinking of what I had promised to do for Nora Jocelyn. I had six records to play and there were six records in the rack. While I was playing *Rock of Ages*, I asked about the *Variations* by Bach.

Mr. Underwood informed me that in that series there were thirty-two records, but we were only playing two sides of one. I reached over and slid each record out of the rack, but Nora's was not among them.

I went through the rest of the program without a hitch. When it was through, Rodney Black's voice came over the mike. "Six minutes short."

"So play the variations through the rest of the time," Mr. Underwood told me. "You got that, Lingenhoffer?"

"Yes sir."

"Well," he clapped me on the shoulder, "no reason why you can't go through with this. You do as well tonight as you did now, and you got yourself a spot on the air!"

I went over to the albums to search for another part of the Bach records. And there was Nora's record, right on top of the album. I knew it must be her's, because it had no ticket in the center.

I knew it was useless to attempt to get it past the detectives who were watching us like hawks. And, I didn't want to break it either.

I opened the album, took out another Bach record, and slipped Nora's record inside. I put Bach on the rack

and left the studio in search of Nora Jocelyn.

She was in studio five rehearsing her ten o'clock show. When she saw me, she put her script down and came over.

"Gee, Elmer, I'm sorry to hear about that awful accident you had. But I'm awfully glad to hear you're taking over Mr. Dartnell's program."

"About your record . . ."

Her eyes brightened. "You found it?"

"Yes. But it's still in the studio. I don't dare take it out."

She turned her head and looked at me out of the corners of her eyes. "Why didn't you break it?"

"I couldn't. I thought it might look suspicious. I'll try tonight."

"You wouldn't double-cross me and play the thing, would you, Elmer?"

"Not if you don't want me to."

"Of course I don't want you to. No one must hear it! Please, Elmer, bring it to me or break it, will you?"

"It's a promise."

THE producer called her. She had to leave me, reluctantly I hope. Then I found I was hungry. I hadn't had lunch! I went down to the locker room for my coat.

I put my hand into my pocket, wondering how much I could afford to eat, when I found Mr. Dartnell's bill.

I took it out, wondering if the bill might now rightfully belong to me, possession being nine-tenths and stuff. And that's how I happened to really look at the bill. And there, to my complete dismay, were pencilled the words, *Call F.B.I. Hurry. Danger.*

I almost fainted!

So he had given me a note after all. But who would think it was on the back of a dollar bill?

The F.B.I. Danger! What had all this to do with Rodney Black and Nora's record? Why was she so anxious to get it destroyed? And was she really in the studio before I'd gotten there? Had she hid while Dartnell slipped me the bill, on the ruse of

getting a package of cigarettes? Or was Miss Kipps lying?

I looked down at the bill, feeling sorry for Mr. Dartnell's frantic effort to attract attention. That must mean that there had been someone in the studio with him. He must have known he was in danger of losing his life. It must be a horrible feeling, stalling for time, sending out for cigarettes, hoping against hope I'd be back in time.

Of course! That would be why he gave me the name of a phony brand of cigarettes! In the hopes that I'd catch hep something was wrong.

But I didn't. I'm a dope. I was angry with myself for having been so stupid!

I looked up and the breath slapped right out of me.

There was Rodney Black again, standing right before me, watching. He had the gun in his hands. This time he wore no mask. His face was pale with anger.

"So, ye little wise guy," he snarled at me. "All along you knew Dartnell give you a note. I thought you said he didn't give you nothin'."

"He gave me a dollar bill. You asked for a note."

"Gimmie!" He extended his hand.

I had to give it to him. What else could I do? He stepped back a few paces, keeping that gun trained on me. Briefly he glanced down at the bill. His lips thinned. With fired eyes he looked at me.

"That's tough, kid!" he said.

"How did you know Dartnell gave me a message like that?"

"Because he said he'd sent for the cops, see? And nobody's been in the studio but you."

"Then you killed Dartnell."

He curled his lips into a sneer. "Your time's up, guy. We can't afford you spillin' this message to cops, now, can we?"

"Not the cops," I corrected. "The F.B.I. It isn't exactly the same thing."

"It could be the Marines and you wouldn't get out of this spot. Ye wisenheimer! I'm gonna bump you off

and hide you. That's what should've been done with Dartnell. But you come back a little too quick. After I kill you, they won't find your body in a month of Tuesdays." The safety of his gun clicked. "They'll figger you got cold feet and run out on the broadcast."

I lunged for him. A bullet whistled past my head. A second later there was another shot. As I hit Black, he seemed to double up. The gun fell from his fingers. He fell to the floor and lay still. He was dead.

One of the cops ran into the locker room. He had a smoking gun in his hands. "Didn't mean to kill him, but—" He looked at me hard. "It's a good thing Whitey decided you needed watching!"

WHEN Detective Whitey came down, I gave him the bill. The detective who had saved my life said he had waited until the last minute to shoot to hear what Black had to say.

Whitey looked at the bill. "Well, that sort of settles the case. It all fits together now."

I said, "You're going to make an arrest?"

"Yeah. Nora Jocelyn. She's the one. She was the dame in the studio with Dartnell before he was shot. They hated each other. I figure that guy knew somethin' about her and she shot him to keep him quiet. The blackmail angle."

"I don't believe that," I said weakly. "She's—"

"Look, Elmer, she's got no alibi for the time of the murder. When you come into the studio, she hid herself, that's all."

"Look, if she did it, why was Rodney Black—"

"But that's simple. Black was nuts about Nora. She's a pretty number and knows her way around. She's in a jam, so maybe she asks Black to help her out. Maybe they were both in on the killin'. Maybe she figgered that after she bumped Dartnell off, there was somethin' to his sending for the cops. That, and the fact that the brand

he sent you for ain't on the market. She tells Black to get after you and see what it is."

"I still don't believe it. I don't believe she was near that studio. All you have is Miss Kipps' word for it."

"Well, you gotta believe somebody."

I suppose if they knew about the record, it would clinch the whole thing. But I didn't say anything about it. I felt rotten. I knew that Nora could wind me around her little finger. Maybe she could do the same thing with Black.

I went back upstairs to the second floor. Miss Kipps was at her desk. I went over to her. "Hey, Miss Kipps, you knew Dartnell pretty well, didn't you?"

"Yeah. Guess I did."

"Did you like him?"

"Yeah. Sorta. He was a pain-in-the-neck sometimes, though. Always complain', beegin' about this and that."

"You knew he didn't like Nora Jocelyn much."

"Of course he didn't. Everybody knows that!"

"Then why do you suppose he suddenly got generous and wanted to play her record, *Hide My Heart*?"

"You mean to say, you don't know why?"

"You know why?"

"Sure I know why! He wanted to play a dirty little trick on her. Embarrass her. Y'see, Nora Jocelyn was at a New Year's Eve party. She got a little high. She sang *Hide My Heart*, which was recorded, and was she pickled! You can hear it plain on the record, hiccups and all. He figured if the public hears the Darling of WDAW sing off in a pickled condition, maybe the other networks wouldn't be so anxious to sign her up."

"I get it. Then it was sort of blackmail."

"Sure. And Dartnell was gonna play it right after the *Rock of Ages*. Like a masterful touch."

"So, Dartnell was a stinker after all. How did Nora know he was going to play the record?"

Miss Kipps looked thoroughly annoyed. "Because—I told her so, see? I didn't think it was fair. After all! Us women is got to stick together once in a while!"

"Did she ask Dartnell not to play it?"

"No. She went upstairs to Mr. Underwood and complained. Mr. Underwood called Mr. Dartnell on the phone here. I don't know what Mr. Underwood said, but Mr. Dartnell said that the record wasn't as bad as all that. It was just one of Miss Jocelyn's bad ones, and he didn't see why he couldn't play a record of his own choice on his own program once in a while!"

"He hung up in a huff. 'There,' he said, 'That'll show 'em who's boss around here.'"

"Tell me, Miss Kipps, did Dartnell try to make an outside call while in the studio shortly before I got in there?"

"No, because there isn't any phone in studio eleven. He made and received his phone calls here at my desk. That is the personal calls. The program calls are handled through the main switchboard."

"Thanks, Kippsie." I went back into the studio.

I WENT over to the desk and picked up the script, then looked at the rack that held the records. I wondered why Dartnell had confided so much in Miss Kipps. If Dartnell wanted to play Nora dirty, the logical thing would be to play the record first and sit back to reap the fruits of his handiwork.

Then a couple of screwy things came to my mind, and I got the whole thing.

I ran over to the Bach album and took out Nora's record. I put it in the rack next to the *Rock of Ages*, grabbed up my script.

Then I ran upstairs to Mr. Underwood's office. I ran past his secretary. I burst into the room. Mr. Underwood was there. So was Nora Jocelyn with two detectives. Nora was crying.

I ran over to Mr. Underwood. "Mr.

Underwood, I want to play Nora Jocelyn's *Hide My Heart* tonight."

He flushed. "How dare you make such a request!"

Nora rushed to her feet with a cry of anger. "Why you—you wouldn't dare!"

"The hell I wouldn't!" I said to her. "May I, Mr. Underwood, it's important."

"You're crazy!" he roared. "Remember your place, you upstart! This is my broadcasting studio. I've heard all I care to about that record! No, you most certainly cannot play it."

"Is that the ultimatum you gave Mr. Dartnell?"

"Yes! He had no right. I told him if he played the record, I'd discharge him, contract or no contract!"

"He was a sort of dope, wasn't he? Not quick to catch on, but the minute he did, he acted. Dartnell has nothing to do with the selections of records for his program. He didn't get the requests by phone—you did!"

"Don't deny it, Mr. Underwood, because when I came into this studio not so long ago, you were talking to someone making a request. Someone you had spoken to before! I thought it was funny that the president should take care of a phone call like that! I'll bet you get the fan mail for the program too. It won't be so hard to find out."

"What the hell!" roared Mr. Underwood, while every inch of him quivered with outraged indignation.

"Now, I've wondered why Mr. Dartnell had written on that bill F.B.I. instead of police or cops. The F.B.I. suggests one thing these days. Spies!"

Mr. Underwood blanched.

"I have just looked over the script, Mr. Underwood, or is your name perhaps, Unterholtz? But this script shows me the answer to Mr. Dartnell's, 'But why should it matter?' that Miss Kipps overheard.

"He was asking you, Mr. Underwood, why it mattered so much whether or not he played Nora's song

Hide My Heart. And I know why it mattered. Dartnell was making an experiment, in which that title came in handy. He told Miss Kipps about it, deliberately suggesting to her, I'm sure, that she tell Nora about his little scheme.

"You see, Dartnell wanted to be sure his suspicions that his program was used to convey messages in code to members of a spy ring, were true."

UNDERWOOD started to go for me, but the cops grabbed him and pinned his arms back. He kept spluttering about me being completely insane.

"We'll see who's crazy," I said, and took out the script. "If you take the first word of each selection to be played tonight, we have a message. 'Tonight Far Rock Away One Thirty-two.'"

"Now, if between the selections, *Rock Of Ages* and *Away Out On A Mountain*, he would have played Nora's title, that same message would have read, 'Tonight Far Rock Hide Away One Thirty-two,' which would mean something totally different to the members of a spy ring. When Mr. Dartnell insisted upon playing that record, you knew he'd caught on. So you killed him!"

"Rodney Black was in on this with you. He was the engineer for this station. A swell place to pick up and send out shortwave messages whenever you thought it was safe. And you used the *Daydream Hour* as a special means of getting your messages across to your spy ring. You had to take care of that program yourself, so that nothing was left to chance.

"And I knew Black was in on this with you, and you only! Because it was you, Mr. Underwood, who so cleverly sent me down into that script room for the *Dotty Dilemma's*. You see, Black was there, waiting for me. He knew I'd be there. Because you sent me there.

"I'm going to ask the police to hold you, Mr. Underwood, while they get

TSD

in touch with the F.B.I. and see what happens down at Far Rockaway at one-thirty tonight.

"And we are going on the air as usual. But instead of playing *One in a Million*, I suggest we play *Three O'clock In The Morning*. Let's see what turns up on the beach there at three thirty-two, two hours later. I think it should be most interesting."

I was right too. All the way.

A Nazi submarine tried to make a landing there at exactly one-thirty that night. We rounded up thirty-five Nazi prisoners.

And two hours later, on that same spot, we rounded up thirty-five members of the spy ring. You see, Rodney Black had contacted the sub, they made arrangements whereby the crew of the sub was to land, while the members of the spy ring overpowered the guards there. Each member of the ring would then take in one member of the sub crew with him into this country.

Well, anyway, I got to take Nora to dinner. She kissed me too. She said I was a hero. She was wrong. I was just in love with her.



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The Wingless Buzzards

By H. Wolff Salz

¶ Up there in the hills, the buzzards can always spot a fresh- ¶
killed body—and so can a hill-billy sheriff.



SETH PLINEY appeared unaware of the man who was coming across the clearing towards the tumble-down clapboard house. His entire attention seemed given to the length of oak timber that he was whittling with his bone-handled knife. The ground at his feet, where he sat on the weather-worn porch puncheon, was covered with long spiraling slivers of wood.

Seth heard a sound behind him and glanced back briefly at the white-haired, hatchet-faced woman who had come out of the house. There was a corncob pipe between her thin lips and the blue eyes she turned towards the approaching man were sharp as a weasel's teeth.

She stood behind Seth and in a dry, acid voice hummed the words of an old Ozark ballad:

I wisht I had my bow-an'-arrer,
My bow-an'-arrer string;
I'd shoot me a hole in yore purty breast
What shines so bright an' green!

Seth's face was morose as he glowered at her. "You want Sheriff Cabot t'hear ye, Mattie?" he demanded.

Mattie Pliney continued puffing her pipe complacently. "Taint no harm effen he does. Hit's just a old song."

"Cabot mightn't think so."

"Don't be so mean and narvish-like," his wife retorted in a lowered voice. "Sheriff might think you got somethin' t'be skeered of."

Seth held back his angry retort as

the sheriff strode around a brush heap and approached to within hearing distance. Sheriff Luke Cabot was a tall, willowy man with long arms and big hands. The gauntness of his thin face was accentuated by prominent cheekbones. People said he had Cherokee blood in his veins. They knew that in his official duties he was as patient and persistent as an Indian on the hunting trail.

"Howdy, Seth. Howdy, Mattie," he waved cheerfully.

Seth glanced up briefly, his eyes sullen. He nodded once, continued whittling his stick.

"Reckon you like our company, Luke," Mattie said. "You've been out t' visit with us every day this week."

"Just passin' by down the road in my car," the sheriff murmured. "Thought I'd drop by to say, howdy."

Neither Seth nor Mattie made any answer to this. They didn't ask him to sit a spell. Seth kept his eyes on the ground, as if his whole attention were given to the shavings of wood at his feet. Mattie met the sheriff's look boldly.

AFTER a moment of heavy silence, Cabot waved his right arm towards the brackish-colored autumn woods behind him. Mattie's sharp eyes followed his gesture. She saw the dark specks wheeling and circling over the tops of the oaks and maples. The dark specks were silhouetted against the hazy outline of timbered hills beyond the woods.

"Them turkey-buzzards," said the sheriff, "are still at it."

Mattie grunted unperturbedly. "Seems like hit."

Sheriff Cabot eyed her shrewdly. "Reckon they're a-lookin' fer some-thin'?"

"'Tain't none of my concern whut them buzzards air up to."

Cabot nodded, then changed the subject. "Where did you say that artist-feller went to after he left here?"

"Went back whar he come from, I reckon," Mattie answered placidly, puffing her pipe. "Kansas City, hit whar."

"You hear from him since?"

"Wharn't no reason fer us t' hear from him."

Seth looked up at the sheriff angrily. "What-all air them questions fer? We already told you he went away last Thursday, said he was going back home. He didn't like our place th' way he thought he would, so he wouldn't buy it."

"Well, I'll tell you, Seth," the sheriff replied softly, "This feller, Dave Rutherford, came down here on th' train, stayed with you two days, and then you say he went on back to Kansas City. Well, likely you're right. Trouble is, though, nobody saw him get the train over t' Summerville. Fact is, nobody saw him again after he come out to your place. Natural-like, rumors are apt to start."

"Air you suspicioning us of some-thin'?" demanded Seth. He had stopped whittling for the first time, his arms arrested in midair. The long-bladed knife in his raw-boned hand gleamed in the late afternoon sun.

Sheriff Cabot looked at Seth thoughtfully, till Seth's eyes lowered to the ground.

"It's this way," Cabot continued. "This artist-feller, Rutherford, had—hasn't any kin-folks back in Kansas City. But there's a gal friend. I got a letter from her and she's kinda worried about this feller. Seems like he ain't come back home like he was expected."

"'Tain't none of our concern," said Mattie calmly

"This gal," continued Cabot as if he hadn't heard, "says Rutherford had three thousand dollars with him when he came out here. Seems you'd done some letter writin' back and forth with him and told him you wanted cash on the barrelhead fer your place. You didn't know nothing about banks and checks and such. This gal is wondering what-all happened to her feller and his three thousand dollars."

"You expectin' us t' know?" asked Mattie. Her voice was low, unruffled. Her manner could have been no calmer if they had been discussing the weather.

Sheriff Cabot glanced significantly towards the wheeling, circling specks over the treetops in the woods. "I was just wondering," he said.

Mattie puffed once or twice on her pipe, then she murmured, "Effen you find out, Sheriff, you might come out hyear and let us know. We're powerful curious, too."

She remained standing behind Seth as the sheriff walked away across the clearing towards the path in the woods that led to the road on the other side. Seth didn't move until the sheriff was 'lost to sight among the trees. Then he lunged to his feet and faced Mattie, his lips trembling, the knife in his hand shaking in excitement.

"I told you, Mattie! I told you Cabot suspicioned us!" he cried in a tremulous voice. "That whar a fool idear to start with! Killing a man is playing with Satan!"

"Shut yore mouth!" Mattie exclaimed fiercely. "I don't want t' hear none of yore yellin'!"

"He knows we done hit, Mattie!" Seth whined. "And with them turkey-buzzards flyin' around up there, maybe he'll find whar we buried the body!"

"He'd hafter dig up th' whole woods!" Mattie retorted contemptuously.

"But them buzzards circlin' around might show him whar t' dig!" cried Seth. "They smell a carcass, Mattie! They're huntin' fer hit!"

"Look at them!" Mattie retorted witheringly. Her fleshless arm stabbed towards the circling specks. "Don't you see they can't tell whar th' body is at! Every day they're in a different place! One day it's the south end,

excitement. "We can dig up the body —tonight. We can take it over to the lake and row out t' the middle. We can tie rocks around it and throw it in th' water. Them buzzards couldn't find it then, under fifteen feet of water. And the sheriff would never find it! Then he couldn't prove nothin', no matter whut he suspicioned!"

Mattie opened her lips for an angry



next day it's the north side, next they're over th' middle. They can't tell whar th' body is at!"

"But they might find it, Mattie. They might find whar hit's buried, then they'll stay there all the time, till Sheriff Cabot sees thim over th' same place and start diggin'!"

"Yo're a jackleg fool, Seth!" Mattie said scornfully.

"Listen, Mattie, I'll tell you some-thin'!" Seth's face was flushed with

retort, clamping the stem of her pipe between snaggle-teeth, then closed her lips. She stared at Seth thoughtfully, her eyes gleaming. Then slowly she nodded her head.

"Sometimes, Seth," she murmured, "I got hopes fer ye're havin' some brains and heart, atter all."

IT WAS close to midnight when they left their clapboard cabin. Seth walked ahead with the shovel and un-

lit kerosene lamp. Mattie followed a step behind. Under her arm she carried a long-barreled, muzzle-loading rifle. Their steps were sure as they moved across the starlit clearing and into the woods.

Under their feet, dead leaves crunched dryly. A great owl flapped silently overhead. From the lake to the north came the croaking song of a bullfrog.

A half hour later, they wriggled their way through a clump of sumac. The ground was covered thickly with brushwood. Seth set the kerosene lamp on a rock, lit it. The yellow flame flickered wanly and cast a pale circle over the ground. Shadows danced weirdly.

Bending low, to avoid the snagging fingerlike limbs of the naked bushes, Seth kicked aside the pile of dry leaves and brushwood, exposing ground that was already beginning to harden in the early autumn frost.

He began to dig into the earth with his shovel, Mattie watching silently. The cold wind snatched at wisps of her hair and blew it over her shadow-hollowed face. She brushed the hair aside impatiently.

Forty-five minutes later, Seth let out a grunt of satisfaction. Mattie moved closer and watched critically over his shoulder.

"Won't take long now," Seth said in a whisper. "I can see some of hit."

"Don't talk," Mattie commanded. "Just keep a-digging."

Both heard the sudden movement behind them at the same time. Seth let

out a startled cry and Mattie jerked the rifle to her shoulder.

"Drop that gun, Mattie," came a voice from the shadows, the familiar voice of Sheriff Cabot. "I can see you sharp as daylight, but you can't see me here in th' dark."

An acrid torrent of invective poured from Mattie's lips. Her eyes strained to make out the shape of the speaker in the darkness-beyond the circle of light. She could see nothing. Slowly, as if realizing the futility of resistance, she lowered the gun. It slipped from her fingers to the ground. Her thin shoulders drooped forward in a gesture of defeat.

Not until then did Sheriff Cabot push through the bushes into the open. In his right hand he held a big-framed revolver.

"You took the bait, Mattie, like I hoped you would," the sheriff said. "And I'm thankful t' you fer it."

"You whar a-watchin' out fer us all the time," Mattie accused bitterly.

"That's right," Sheriff Cabot nodded. "Right from the edge of the woods up by yore house. I figured you'd get skeered about them buzzards showing me t' the grave, sooner or later. That air's why I kept them buzzards circling around the woods."

"You kept the buzzards circlin' in th' woods!" Mattie exclaimed incredulously.

"Shore, by settin' out a couple of dead chickens around on the ground every day," nodded Cabot, then he added reflectively, "I reckon, though, we won't be bothered no longer by buzzards hyearabouts, leastways, not the wingless breed."





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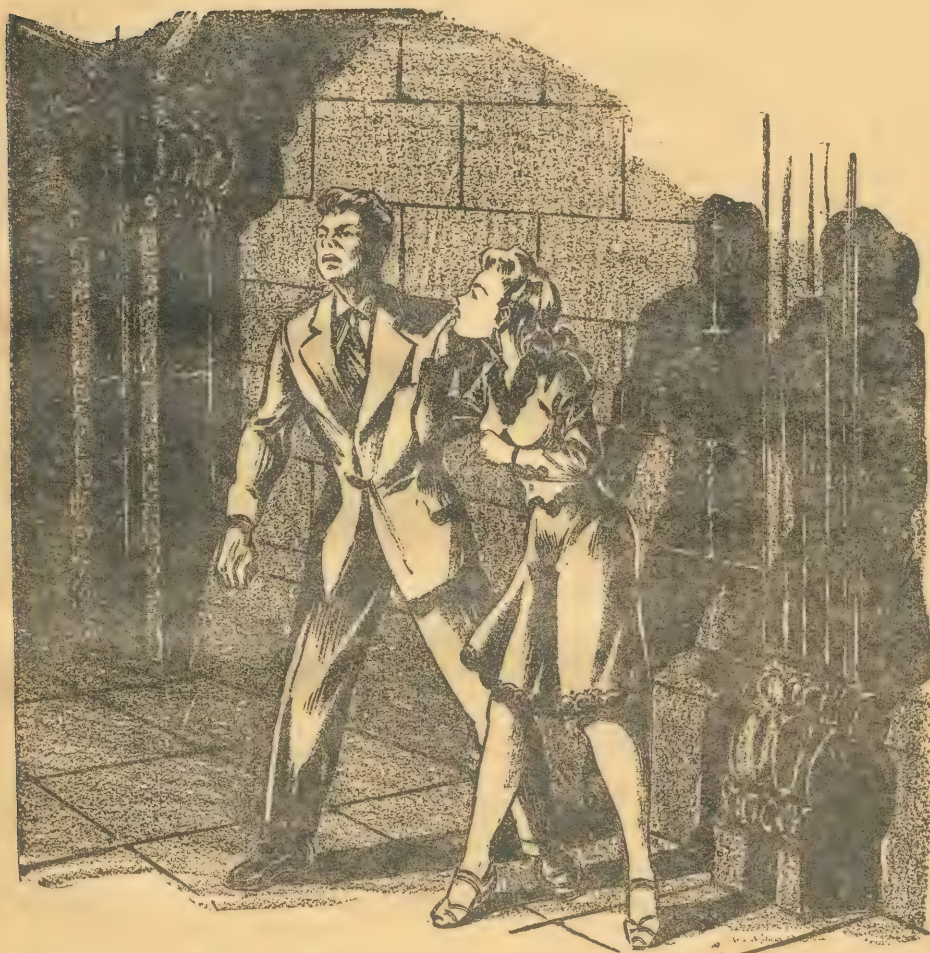
★ ★ ★

The tomb of Bill Brandon's uncle was guarded by a blue angel, the girl's note said. Bill didn't believe in such stuff, but when he visited that colossal crypt, he found out that guardian's name—the Angel of Death!

★ ★ ★

The Angel Satan Sent

By Norman A. Daniels



CHAPTER I

THE doorman of the swank private club threaded his way between the chairs, eyes searching everywhere until he saw six-foot-tall Bill Brandon. The doorman made a straight line toward Brandon and extended a sealed envelope.

"This just came for you, sir. A young lady in a taxicab pulled up,

gave me the letter, and asked me to deliver it to you personally. She seemed excited about something, sir."

"You been holding out, Bill?" Art Curtis stirred lazily in the deep chair he occupied. "Mash notes from excited dames."

"Don't be silly," Brandon said somewhat sharply.

Art Curtis was an attorney, not a

very successful one because he was too lazy, but he stuck with Bill Brandon until sometimes Brandon felt like trying to get rid of him permanently. Curtis wasn't likeable, although he tried hard enough to be. There was a sarcastic vein running through his makeup and it usually showed in everything he said or did.

Bill Brandon slit the flap of the envelope and drew out a folded piece of note paper. Art Curtis saw Brandon's face grow suddenly grim and then sardonic.

"What is it?" Curtis arose.

"An anonymous note," Brandon shrugged. "Written in feminine handwriting, probably by the girl who handed it to the doorman. The note says that under no condition should I enter the mausoleum of my grandfather; but if I'm forced to by circumstances, then I must beware of the Blue Angel. Does that make sense?"

"Sounds like ravings." Curtis studied the letter and handed it back to Brandon. "What the heck would you want in your grandfather's mausoleum? The place even scares me from the outside. Big enough to bury fifty people in. Expensive too. You should know."

Brandon grimaced. "I should! I really didn't expect anything from the old man. He was as eccentric as the dickens, tight-fisted, and miserly. Funny what some people will do. The old man put almost every dime into that mausoleum. It's probably one of the biggest and best in the whole country. He made provisions that twenty-four others could be entombed there. Twenty-four—and I'm the only one left of the family. Me, 4F in the draft because I've got a bad heart. Busted flat except for the house he left me. Now how could I be expected to marry and raise a family big enough to ever use that tomb?"

Curtis laughed: "He was certainly an odd duck. I met him a lot. He was always running to his lawyers. I worked for that firm then. Remem-

ber? He paid us an annual retaining fee and got his money's worth. Five years now since he died, isn't it?"

"Five years tomorrow," Brandon frowned. "That's what makes this anonymous note seem so odd. Well, it's probably just a coincidence. The prank of some nut who probably saw the mausoleum and cooked up a fantastic nightmare. Blue Angel! That grandfather of mine was much more likely to have turned into a Red Devil."

BRANDON wandered away, stopping for a moment at the bulletin board and wondering when his name would be posted for non-payment of dues. He had a job, but it didn't pay too much; practically all of it went into the big house his grandfather left him. Brandon couldn't sell it, not now, and the property was worth too much to let go.

He kicked at an imaginary object on the deep rug, got his hat, and wandered out of the club. Almost unconsciously he discovered he was walking in the direction of the cemetery on the outskirts of the town.

It was atop a hill and the entrance was brilliantly illuminated by an imposing light in the form of a huge flaming torch. His grandfather had caused that to be erected, saying he wanted to leave some memento, besides the vast mausoleum which stood directly next to the big torch. The light, he had claimed, would serve to make the graveyard a more pleasant place by night and he'd donated so much cash to the cemetery that nothing he requested would have been refused.

Bill Brandon leaned against the ornamental fence and stared at the mausoleum, starkly vivid in the pure white light from the torch. It was a three-story affair, large enough to accommodate a good-sized family if it had been a house for the living. Inside, the place looked like an imposing chapel with a copper crypt in the middle of the floor. Long, narrow windows of dark glass were beautifully

arranged. The door was of metal and—Bill Brandon idly fingered the only key in the world to this mausoleum.

He invariably carried it to remind himself that he was as close to starvation as his grandfather had been away from it. Brandon held no hatred in his heart. His grandfather had earned his fortune; it was his to dispose of as he saw fit—even to erecting this imposing and incredibly expensive monument to his own memory.

Brandon drew out that strange note and read it with ease under the brilliant glow of that torch light. It was odd that he should receive it on almost the anniversary of his grandfather's death.

Brandon thought back, ruefully, over those five years. They hadn't been pleasant, eking out a living from what was left of his income after paying for the big house. Eccentric grandfathers were certainly not on the profitable side of life's ledger. Not for him.

He rubbed his chin and wondered what the reference to the Blue Angel meant. Why should he beware of it? Why should he enter the mausoleum anyway? He stowed the note away carefully and realized he'd been leaning against the fence, deep in his own thoughts for quite a long time. Brandon was, essentially, a young man of action. He squared his jaw, gave the fence gate a push and walked into the cemetery.

The big mausoleum was just inside the gate, its arched entrance a forbidding thing. Brandon drew out the key, thrust it into the lock, and twisted it. The mechanism worked only under considerable pressure. He had an idea it was badly rusted.

The heavy door was well-balanced, but gave off a high-pitched squeal when he pushed it open. The sound, in conjunction with the eerie surroundings, made Brandon break out in a cold sweat. He entered a tiny foyer and then ducked to clear the low doorway leading into the tomb proper.

Light shone through the high narrow windows from the monumental electric torch just outside. A weird, purplish glow. The place had a musty smell. Two years had passed since Brandon had opened that door. He shivered at the sight of the tomb in the middle of the otherwise utterly bare floor. It seemed to have a glow around it.

His eyes slowly moved to encompass the entire place, to its arched and pointed dome high above. It was the same old place, completely lacking in Blue Angels. Art Curtis was probably right. That note was the work of some crackpot with a peanut for a brain.

The complete silence wasn't inspiring. Brandon knew no one lived within half a mile of this graveyard and that a patrolman wandered past no more than twice a night.

"I've had enough," he said aloud, and the mausoleum picked up the words and echoed them back at him with a discordant added note.

"No reflection on you, old timer," Brandon spoke to the crypt beneath which his grandfather lay buried, "but I don't mind saying I could have used a small part of the money you invested in this house for the dead. So long, grandpappy, until next year. Maybe by then you'll have some company if what those Army doctors said was true."

THE niches lining the walls seemed to positively leer back at him in the ghostly purple light. Brandon repressed a shudder and started to turn back toward the door.

As he did so, the door gave vent to a violent squeal that grated like a white hot iron against his already tensed nerves. His slow turn became a quick pivot, but he was too late to do much about the intruder.

He was a little man, no more than five-feet-five, but he made up for his lack of size by the forty-five calibre automatic in his fist. His lips were twisted in a wry grin and he certainly

showed neither fear nor respect for this house of the dead.

"Nice place for a funeral, ain't it?" he laughed harshly.

"Look out, pal, or it'll be yours. Stick your hands in the air—high. That's it. You got more sense than I figured. Now walk over against that wall, face me, and don't move. Get that? Don't move. It won't be safe, because a little chunk of steel-tipped lead can travel a lot faster than you. Anyway, a guy with a bum ticker like yours can't move quick."

Brandon obeyed the orders stolidly although his heart was pounding furiously. All he could think of was the warning of the doctors at the medical center when they'd rejected him for the armed services. Under conditions like this, something should happen to that pump. The way Brandon felt it would happen in a matter of seconds.

The sawed-off gunman watched him narrowly at first, then surmised that Brandon was too scared to do much about his predicament. Boldly, the gunman walked toward the crypt in the middle of the floor. He didn't seem any too sure of his next move, but the only item of consequence in the place was that crypt.

Brandon, flesh cold in horror of the spot he was in, watched all this in an almost detached manner. Detached, that is, until he noticed the color of the light that filled the mausoleum was changing. It grew lighter, a perfect blue color and it seemed to center directly above the crypt.

Then Brandon thought his heart would really stop beating. The light had created a definite image on the floor of the tomb, directly in front of the crypt. The form of an angel, ghastly blue in color. The gunman couldn't see it because he was directly in the middle of the image across the floor, but he was aware of the change in the color of the light. His gun was levelled and steady as a rock.

"What happened?" he demanded. "Who else is in here?"

"Only a-a dead man," Brandon

managed. "In that crypt right behind you."

"The light—it's changed. Some kind of a trick you pulled to try and scare me. I don't scare, Brandon. Remember that. I don't scare."

HE WAS slowly backing closer to the crypt as he spoke, but Brandon was hardly aware of the killer's words. He felt a cool night breeze sweeping over him and carried with it was a scent of flowers. Funeral flowers! Overwhelmingly sweet and his brain reeled. There were no flowers in this tomb, no possibility of a cool breeze entering except through the open door—and there had been no appreciable breeze outside.

The gunman, wary and cautious, seemed to be debating within himself whether or not to open fire. He blamed Brandon for this distraction and his gun was pointed straight at him.

"What made the light in here turn blue?" he demanded. "Talk, or so help me, I'll start pumping slugs. What kind of a trick is this?"

"No trick," Brandon gulped. "I'm as scared as you."

"Well, I ain't scared. Nothing scares me, but if you were able to make the light change in here, you might be able to do other things so—I guess I'll just make sure there won't be any tricks."

The gunman smiled. In the blue light that surrounded him, he seemed like a ghastly spectre. Brandon sensed that the man's finger was very tight against the trigger. He tensed, set to rush the gun. It was better to die trying to fight than merely standing there like a dummy while the gun barked.

The killer moved back another half a pace, as if he expected Brandon to begin the rush. The gunman's elbow came into contact with the crypt. He made no sound. He simply folded up like an inflated football when its bladder is punctured. His knees buckled and he fell sideways. His shoes made a slight scratching sound and that

was all, except for the sudden thump when he finally hit the cement floor.

At that precise instant the blue angel, outlined on the floor, moved like lightning. It seemed to take wing as it shot across the floor and was silhouetted perfectly against the high wall behind the crypt. A huge, unbelievable thing. Its lines were distinct enough, the wings were outspread, but the image had no recognizable face, only the outline of one.

As Brandon stood there in a terrified trance, he saw the image slowly fade. At the same time the odor of flowers vanished and so did the cool breeze on the back of his neck.

Brandon gave a wild yell and leaped toward the fallen gunman. He dragged him away from the crypt, knelt, raised the man slightly and heard something clink metallically on the floor. He didn't take time to see what it was. He pulled back the man's sleeve and felt for a pulse. There was none. The gunman had died with the sardonic killer's grin still on his features.

Brandon arose and sprinted toward the exit. The door was about one inch ajar. He pushed it all the way open, hesitated a moment, and decided not to take time to close it. He raced along the path to the cemetery entrance, through the gates; and onto the street.

Two or three blocks away he saw the glint of a street lamp on a patrolman's badge. Brandon yelled and ran toward the officer.

CHAPTER II

THE cop looked at him quizzically, then remarked, "You're the grandson of Harrison Brandon who is buried in that castle, huh? And you went there tonight and some guy with a gun stuck you up. Then there was a blue angel and flowery perfume and a cool breeze. Then the guy with the gun just folded up and died, huh? Okay, Mr. Brandon, we'll go have a look. Stay close by me, because if there ain't no corpse, you're going bye-

bye to some place where they mend busted brains."

Brandon knew how fantastic his story sounded, but it was the truth. He became impatient to get it over with. The door of the mausoleum was wide open, just as he had left it. Brandon was the first inside, followed by the patrolman with a service pistol in his hand.

Brandon stopped so short that the cop bumped into him. There was no corpse lying on the floor. No sweet perfume. In fact, the place seemed stuffy again. Only that dark purple light filled the place. That and an eerie silence.

"Well?" The cop shivered despite himself. "Where is the guy with the gun?"

"He was there," Brandon pointed. "Right there on the floor this side of the crypt. I tell you I'm not crazy. I didn't imagine this. It was real. Just as real as—as the two of us standing here right now."

"Sure, sure," the cop soothed him. "It ain't for me to judge who is crazy, but you've got to come down to headquarters with me. Be reasonable about this."

Brandon felt something beneath his right foot. He moved aside a bit and saw a brass disc on the floor. He didn't know what it was, but realizing it wouldn't help one iota in convincing the cop, he promptly put his foot on it.

"I'll be glad to go down to headquarters," he said slowly. "Let's get out of here. I'm scared and it's hot enough in here to smother a man."

Brandon pulled out a handkerchief, mopped his face. As he turned around, he dropped the handkerchief. Retrieving it, he also scooped up the brass disc. It went into his pocket with the handkerchief.

He moved ahead of the cop, left the mausoleum and waited until the policeman emerged. Then he turned to close the door, slammed it into place, then suddenly darted around the corner of the edifice, along the side where

none of the light from that bizarre electric torch reached.

The cop yelled a command to halt, but he didn't open fire. Brandon had gambled on that. After all, he'd committed no crime beyond showing some rather plain symptoms of being crazy. The cop wouldn't cut him down.

Brandon knew the graveyard well. His grandfather had insisted that he accompany him on his daily visits while the mausoleum was being built. Brandon dodged from one tombstone to another, gradually losing the patrolman. At the extreme other end of the cemetery he scaled the iron fence and walked briskly along the quiet streets, until he came to a small public park fairly close to the business section.

He sat down on a bench and took out the brass disc. It had apparently been affixed to a chain which broke for the tiny hole bored into the disc was covered by fresh scratches. He turned the disc over. It was a medal, granted to one Henry Nesbit in acknowledgment of his prowess as a marksman with a pistol.

"This," Brandon mused aloud, "was worn by the little rat who died in the tomb. At least I can identify him unless he swiped this from somebody. But what killed him and where did the body go? What caused the Blue Angel?"

The Blue Angel brought back a recollection of that anonymous note and he promptly took it out of his pocket. This was his only real clue. The note and the woman who had given it to the doorman at the club. Brandon was on his feet in a second.

HE HURRIED back to the club. It wasn't much after eleven o'clock, even though it seemed to him he'd left the club many hours ago. The doorman was still on duty, but Brandon first studied the sidewalks to make sure no blue-coated patrolmen were around. Undoubtedly an alarm had been sent out for him. Once they threw him into a cell all hope of ever

solving the mystery of the Blue Angel would be gone.

Satisfied the way was clear, he crossed the street, took the doorman into a dark spot near the entrance to the club and questioned him briefly.

"Why certainly, Mr. Brandon," the doorman said, "I remember the girl. Tow-headed, pretty as could be too. Not apt to forget her. She came in Joe Lynch's hack. He is usually on the feed line to the club. Was here just a few minutes ago, in fact, and he'll be back."

"Good," Brandon said. "When he returns, get him over here. I—I've got to keep out of sight. Be a good fellow and give me a break."

"In trouble, Mr. Brandon?" the doorman asked bluntly. "I didn't mean to say that. I've known you for years. If there is something wrong, it ain't your fault. I figured something was up, too, because some cops went into the club—duck, they're coming out."

Brandon instantly crouched as low as possible and held his breath. Two men questioned the doorman briefly. Then they hailed a cab from the feed line and were driven away. A full half hour passed, then the doorman gave a signal. A taxi was pulling into line.

The doorman went down the street, talked to the driver, and hopped the running board while the cab pulled up in front of the club. Brandon darted across the sidewalk and piled in.

"You're looking for the girl who gave the doorman a letter?" The driver glanced over his shoulder. "Yeah, I know where she lives. Picked her up as she came out the door. Want to go there?"

"The quicker, the better." Brandon sighed in relief. At least he was on the trail of the truth and that meant something.

The cab stopped in front of a modest bungalow in one of the middle class residential sections. Lights gleamed in some of the windows.

Brandon paid off the driver, added a five dollar bill which he couldn't really afford, but he was extremely grateful

and wanted to show it. He waited until the taxi vanished, then walked briskly up a short path lined with flowers. The perfume of them made him wince. They reminded him of the tomb.

AS HE stepped onto the porch, Brandon heard a car rolling slowly by the house and promptly ducked. It might be the cops on the prowl for him. A black sedan moved by, picked up speed, and disappeared. Brandon arose, went to the door, and punched the bell.

He clutched the anonymous note in one hand and wore a belligerent expression. Maybe the girl would be pretty, but he was going to be tough.

Tow hair and the usual blue eyes that went with it meant nothing to him. He was flirting with an asylum. For an instant he wondered if what had happened in the tomb hadn't been the result of a twisted mind. Only the hard round disc in his pocket proved Nesbit had been in the mausoleum, too.

The door opened and Brandon blinked. The doorman had said the girl was pretty, but that was a masterpiece of understatement. She was beautiful and obviously frightened too.

"My name is Brandon—"

"Yes, I know," she said. "Please come in. I—I was afraid you'd find me."

Brandon stepped into a comfortable little house that seemed to go precisely with this girl. When she was fully revealed by the lights in the room, he saw just how beautiful she was. He forgot about being tough.

"I guess you think I'm pretty crude, crashing in on you like this, but I had to know about this note. You see—I went to the tomb. I—saw the Blue Angel."

"I don't know what you're talking about," the girl said. "You sound—mad."

"The cops think I am," Brandon answered wryly. "Sometimes I wonder

myself. That's why I've got to know why you sent me this note."

"I didn't send you a note," she replied. "I knew you were Bill Brandon. I saw you several times when my father did some work for your grandfather. But you're talking nonsense."

"Look here," Brandon said grimly, "it isn't nonsense and you know it. I can prove you delivered this note to the doorman of my club. It warns me against entering the tomb and tells me of the danger offered by a Blue Angel. Where is your father? Maybe he knows something about this."

"My father was—buried yesterday," the girl said.

"Oh," Brandon answered somewhat lamely. "I'm sorry. I—maybe I'd better come back some other time. But sooner or later you've got to tell me what was meant by that note."

"I wish you would go," she said. "Otherwise, I'll be forced to call the police."

Brandon mentally wished she was a man or an old hag. Anything but a beautiful girl whom he couldn't possibly get tough with. He rubbed his chin for a moment.

"I think," he said, "I'll let you call the police. Now they'd compare your handwriting to that on this note. If it checked, you'd really have something to explain. However, if you're not afraid to face them, neither am I. Where is the telephone?"

The girl sat down slowly. "No. Don't bother. Please—I can't talk about it now. I—"

There was an elongated shadow along the further wall. A harsh voice came from directly behind Brandon.

"Maybe you'd rather talk to us, gorgeous. This guy is a nut. The cops are on his trail. Don't pay any attention to him."

Brandon started to get up. The cold, uncomfortable end of a gun pressed lightly against the back of his neck.

"Sit down," another voice snapped.

Brandon relaxed as much as possible and felt his heart begin to pound painfully again. He wondered just how

much more of this sort of thing he could stand.

TWO MEN walked between him and the girl. They were burly, tough-looking individuals and carried their guns with the same calm serenity that Nesbit had displayed.

"Thanks for leaving the door open, sister." One of them grinned at the girl. He faced Brandon and grinned wider. "And thanks to you for leading us here. We figured you'd get on the trail of this girl before long. Now it's the showdown."

"Apparently," Brandon snapped. "What do you want? What is this all about?"

"Well, you see," the spokesman laughed, "this girl's pop died the other day and he talked a little before he passed out. It was in a hospital. Somebody we know heard him raving, so we decided to find out what he was raving about. The girl knows. It would be much healthier for both of you if she talked."

"Why you—" Brandon jumped up. The man who stood beside him, jabbed a hard left at Brandon's neck and connected. He followed this up with two more punches. All the while his right hand kept a gun trained on Brandon.

"Let me prove it's best he keeps quiet," the spokesman snarled.

He stepped up to Brandon and swung hard. Brandon saw the blow coming and rolled back with it, so the full effect of the punch was lost. He dropped into the chair and stayed there, his chin lolling limply against his chest. The crook faced the girl again.

"That's a sample of what you'll get, lady, unless you start talking. Your old man was a contractor and he did a lot of work for old Harrison Brandon. We want to know what he told you before he died."

Neither crook paid much attention to Brandon now. They figured he was out for a few minutes at least. Brandon stayed in the chair until one of

the men slapped the girl smartly across the face and drew a cry of pain from her. His hand went back for another slap.

Brandon fished the brass disc out of his pocket. Before either of the two crooks knew what happened, he flipped the disc onto a table between them.

"That," Brandon said, "belonged to a guy with ten times more nerve than either of you creampuffs possess. I took it away from Nesbit, a much tougher bird than you mugs. You haven't seen him around the last couple of hours and you won't, because he's dead."

"Get him!" the taller of the pair yelled.

CHAPTER III

BRANDON'S hunch was right. Nesbit had been a tough, quick-witted crook with a reputation. The two gunmen here were of a much weaker calibre. Obviously they knew Nesbit was dead. Whoever killed him was someone to contend with. They waited a fraction of a second too long before pulling triggers.

Brandon hit the first man a resounding whack under the jaw. Brandon was no fighter, he didn't even know he packed a substantial wallop until the crook literally left the floor, flew backwards, and crashed against a chair.

The second man gave a bleat of alarm and tried to reach the door. Brandon grabbed him by the collar, yanked the gun out of his grasp, and threw it into a corner. Then he methodically proceeded to make pulp of the man's face.

He was engrossed in this very pleasant task when the girl shouted a warning. The other man was on his feet, holding a straight-back chair high and ready to smash it against Brandon's skull. Brandon sidestepped quickly, started for the crook, but the man parried with the chair, finally thrusting it forward violently.

It hit Brandon on the chest and he sat down abruptly. The first crook was already heading for the door, somewhat blindly because his eyes were closing. He made it and was promptly joined by his mate. The door slammed behind them.

Brandon raced in pursuit, reached the porch, only in time to see the black sedan pull away. He turned back. The girl stood behind him, her face still ashen except where the crook's hand had inflamed the skin.

"Are you all right?" Brandon asked anxiously.

"I—I'm quite all right. Thank you, Bill—Mr. Brandon. Dad always called you Bill. He said you got a bad break."

"Let's sit down." Brandon locked the door. "We've a lot to talk about. That is, if you still don't want me to leave."

"I was wrong," she said. "Terribly wrong. But now I know Dad wasn't raving. I didn't think so when I wrote you that note, but later I thought it was so silly. That's why I denied it. My father was—"

"Weldon Vernon," Brandon said promptly. "When those mugs spoke of him as a contractor, I knew who he was. He built that mausoleum for my grandfather, didn't he? And I remember you too, a pretty little kid. That was five years ago. You grew up into something—lovely. And—your name is Hazel?"

"Then I won't have to introduce myself." The girl flushed slightly. "But we can't delay. Those men proved we must work fast and—I'm sorry I said you were crazy. Maybe it's I whose brain is off key."

"Tell me about the Blue Angel," Brandon urged. "I've seen it. Believe me, it was no angel."

"Five years ago your grandfather was dying. He knew he didn't have long to last," Hazel Vernon said. "At the same time, my father was very sick. He and your grandfather had the same doctor. He must have talked, because your grandfather came here and blantly said he'd pay a lot of money if

my dad could get the strength to do this particular job. He admitted frankly that he selected my dad, because he was ready to die soon, and not likely to give away any secrets."

"He would," Brandon shrugged. "I'm not like him, believe me. All he thought about was money and more money. Then he put it all into this mausoleum."

"Dad took the job. Your grandfather died, but dad lived until three days ago. He always seemed to be carrying some secret around with him since he built the tomb. He mumbled about it in his sleep. Then, when he was dying, he told me to get in touch with you. To tell you never to enter the tomb, but if you disregarded the warning, to watch out for the Blue Angel. Naturally, I thought it was the ravings of a man whose mind was affected by approaching death."

Brandon frowned. "It wasn't raving. I went to the tomb. A gunman named Nesbit got the drop on me. It was obvious he had followed me, waited until I opened the mausoleum door, and then came in."

"But what in the world was he after?" Hazel Vernon asked.

"I WISH I knew," Brandon groaned. "That's only the half of it. I didn't really polish off Nesbit as I told those two monkeys who were here. I merely had a hunch they knew him, knew he was missing, and that anybody who could take Nesbit must be a very dangerous man."

"A very brave man," Hazel amended. "They really were afraid of you after they saw the brass disc. You—got that from Nesbit?"

"Not exactly. Nesbit had a gun pointed at me. Then the Blue Angel appeared. It was silhouetted on the floor, right around the crypt where my grandfather's body is interred. Nesbit couldn't see it, because it encompassed him too. He was ready to shoot me. The Blue Angel moved. It rose from the floor and took shape on the wall.

At that instant, Nesbit just folded up and died.

"I got a policeman, but when we returned, Nesbit's body wasn't there. Only the brass disc which must have fallen off when they carried him away."

"When *who* carried him away, Bill?"

"How do I know? Some of his friends, I suppose. That brings to mind another dangerous fact. We haven't only the Blue Angel to contend with, but a band of crooks as well. Hazel, I'm not afraid of the Blue Angel. It protected me from Nesbit. It's just that the thing is so awe-inspiring, I guess."

"It is dangerous," Hazel said swiftly. "Dad said it was and he knew what he was talking about. Bill, you must be very careful. I—wouldn't want anything to happen to you."

"Well, thanks," Brandon grinned broadly. "That's pretty nice to hear. A guy who struggles along trying to make ends meet isn't too popular. Not in the set I'm supposed to travel in. Hazel, I'm going back to the tomb. I intend to find out what killed Nesbit and why."

"Then I'm going with you." She arose. "Don't argue with me, Bill, I'm stubborn. In some way, I feel my father was responsible for what happened. There must be something in that tomb. Something those crooks knew about, too."

"But what?" Brandon asked. "That mausoleum cost an awful lot of money. He put every nickel into it, except for the big house he left to me. I know, Hazel. I talked to his lawyers. They're one of the most reputable law firms in these parts. Art Curtis worked for them, too, and he knew the inside story."

"Who is Art Curtis?"

"Well, you wouldn't like him. He's lazy and, I suspect, unethical in his practice of law. I met him just before my grandfather died and he's stuck around ever since. Maybe I'll be glad. Right now I need a lawyer."

"When do you intend to go back to the mausoleum, Bill?"

"Tomorrow—by daylight. Lady, the sun is one of the best ghost-busters in existence. I don't know exactly what the Blue Angel is, but it could be classed as a spectre, I suppose."

"Then promise to let me go with you. I've got to, Bill. Don't you see? My dad knew the secret of the tomb, part of it at least. He tried to tell me, but couldn't. He'd have wanted me to help."

"Otherwise I won't see you again?" Brandon commented sagely.

"Otherwise you definitely will not."

"Then I'll be here tomorrow. First time I ever knew a ghost could be the beginning of a romance. Good night, Hazel. Keep the doors and windows locked. Call the cops if those birds come back, but don't tell them you know me or we'll both meet in the clink."

BRANDON left the house, didn't dare risk a bus or trolley ride, or even hail a taxi. By now the police would have an elaborate net out for him. He didn't want to become enmeshed in it. Not now, not with Hazel Vernon waiting for him in the morning.

It suddenly occurred to Brandon that even though he was walking very fast and was extremely tense, his heart seemed to beat normally. He grinned and blamed it on tow hair and blue eyes.

He slowed up near the vicinity of his home, however. It was a spacious place. Some of the rooms he hadn't seen in weeks and didn't want to. There were no servants, not on his forty dollars a week salary. The house was set back from the street and shaded by trees in daylight, shrouded by them in the gloom of night.

Brandon saw a dim form lurking just outside the path leading up to the place. Instantly he drew back out of sight. That might be either the police or one of those crooks. Either would be dangerous to face and Brandon had

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had enough danger for one night.

He wanted rest and quiet above all. Time to think, to assimilate the facts he knew and the problems which Hazel's statement had engendered. There was something behind all this, something that smacked of the ethereal, with sudden death in the background—and overshadowing it all, the huge million dollar mausoleum of a man who seemed to worship himself in death as much as in life.

Brandon had these things on his mind when a hand rested gently on his shoulder. He gave a smothered cry, whirled around, one arm drawing back to wind up a punch. He stopped the blow before it started whizzing. Art Curtis stood there, barely discernible in the darkness.

"Hold everything, Bill," he whispered. "What the devil have you been up to? Cops swarmed all over the club hunting for you. There are several of 'em hanging around your house. Who in heck did you strangle?"

"Nobody—yet," Brandon said grimly, "but I'm warming up to it. That note about the Blue Angel was authentic all right. There is a Blue Angel in my grandfather's palatial tomb, only it seems to be a guardian angel so far as I'm concerned. Art, do me a favor."

"Anything you like, even to bail. With certain limits. My bank accounts are like a Scotchman's iced tea—weak."

"Just pretend you're me. Start moving down the street and draw those cops off. When they catch you, just say you thought they were footpads. I want to get into the house and look through some of the old boy's papers. There might be a clue as to what makes the mausoleum so interesting."

"I'll not only do that, but try and slip back to the house myself," Curtis declared. "You need help, Bill. Sometimes I had a feeling you resented me, but right now I may be of assistance and prove my friendship."

"Good," Brandon said. "I'll leave the side door open."

Curtis apparently did an elegant job with the police. He drew them all away for three or four minutes and Brandon slipped into the house easily. He didn't dare turn on any lights, but he knew where there was a small pencil flash which served to prevent him from stumbling against chairs and other furniture.

He entered his grandfather's study, a huge, almost barren room, hung in jet black. The atmosphere didn't serve to scatter any of the horror that still clung from the episode in the tomb. Brandon shivered, but advanced into the room doggedly and proceeded toward the big oak desk in one corner.

The weak ray of the pencil flash swept some of the darkness away as it moved across the surface of the desk. Then the flash stopped and centered on an object that made Brandon give a hissing intake of breath.

It was a small statue in the form of an angel with folded wings—and it was colored a bright blue. His hand started to reach for it.

SUDDENLY the huge, half-empty house was filled with a roaring sound. It seemed to come from every direction and blared from room to room, echoing and re-echoing in the hallways.

"Don't go too far! Don't go too far, Bill Brandon! Don't go too far!"

Like a parrot the words were repeated. Then they were cut off as abruptly as they came. Brandon found his face drenched in sweat. He tried to figure out the source of that voice, but knew he couldn't. The only thing he was well aware of was the fact that if any cops were outside, they certainly heard that voice. It must have carried for blocks and Brandon's ears still rang from it.

"Bill! Bill!" someone called out cautiously. "For heaven's sake, where are you?"

It was Art Curtis. He'd reached the house successfully.

Brandon had felt relief before, but

the mere fact that someone else was near him, someone who could help, meant a great deal now. He rushed to meet Curtis.

"That voice," Curtis gasped. "Bill, what was it? The thing didn't sound human."

"I've a hunch it was though," Brandon said. "I—listen! Pounding at the door. That'll be the cops. We've got to get out of here. Doggone it, just when things were ready to run smoothly."

"Cops or no cops," Curtis breathed softly, "I want to get out of this place. Nothing human gave off that blast, Bill. Nobody could shout so loudly."

"Keep guard," Brandon said. "With the cops closing in like this, we can't waste time. I'm going to the mausoleum again. Now. Tonight. You can come along if you like, but someone else will be with us. Hazel Vernon. I promised I wouldn't go there without her. I'm going to phone her."

"You idiot," Curtis growled. "The cops will bust in here in seconds flat."

But Brandon had already sprinted away to a room where there was a phone. Hazel answered immediately.

"Can't explain now. No time," Brandon said, "but I'm going into the mausoleum as soon as I can reach it. Be there outside the gate. Don't try to get in yourself. I've got the only key."

"I'll be there," Hazel answered breathlessly. "Oh, Bill, I hope it turns out all right."

"Nothing that can happen could be much worse," he said. "See you at the gate."

CHAPTER IV

THE police had the front door down when Brandon and Curtis exited through a narrow door at the side of the house. It was little used and, on the outside, looked like only part of a solid wall except for a door-knob which the police would easily overlook in the dark.

"I used to call this my secret door when I was a kid," Brandon told Cur-

tis with a grin. "When my grandfather didn't know, I used it. He whaled the daylights out of me once for slipping out this way after I was supposed to be in bed."

"Your grandfather," Curtis grumbled, "was a goofy old duck."

"Now see here," Brandon protested. "After all, he was my grandfather and I won't stand having him insulted. He was just a miserly, tight-fisted old skinflint who lived for just one reason, to pile up more and more money."

"And for what?" Curtis answered. "To build himself a mausoleum big enough for a band of gypsies to tent inside of. Where do we go from here?"

Brandon led the way through a labyrinth of bushes and trees until they reached a street behind the big house. There they struck north at a dog trot and finally managed to hail a cab. They were driven to within a quarter of a mile of the cemetery.

Brandon dismissed the cab, paid off the driver. With Curtis at his side, they hurried toward the graveyard. It was just short of three in the morning. Suddenly Curtis seized Brandon's arm.

"Do you think you should go through with this?" he asked. "Bill, that heart of yours. The doctors warned against excitement."

"I'm going ahead," Brandon answered doggedly. "I might as well be dead as to try and convince the cops I'm not crazy. The only way to do that is by bringing into the open the secret of that tomb. There's Hazel. Listen, Art, no chiseling, understand?"

Curtis shuddered. "Who could think of such a thing in an atmosphere like this. If I could throw that high, I'd heave a rock through that crazy light your grandfather had built beside the mausoleum. Cemeteries aren't meant to be illuminated like Broadway was before the war."

Hazel saw them and ran in their direction. She acknowledged an introduction to Curtis with a slight nod and clung to Brandon's arm.

"Bill, I've been so frightened. Maybe we ought to wait until daylight."

"Can't," Brandon replied curtly. "Things are happening too fast. First of all, the cops are getting closer. Curtis and I felt them breathing down our necks a few minutes ago. Then, too, I received a warning not to go too far. Someone doesn't want me to investigate the tomb. That's why I'm going in and tear the place apart. Dig up the old man if necessary."

"Do—do you think that's right?" Hazel asked in awe.

"We'd find some traces of him," Brandon went on. "Time may have decomposed the body, but there'll be a nice big rock where his heart was supposed to be. Come on, we're wasting time."

They opened the gate, slipped through, and approached the mausoleum door. Brandon had the key in his hand. He stopped short and listened intently. Not a sound reached him. The tombstones threw crazy shadows all around from the light of that odd torch that rose up to almost the top of the tomb. Brandon noticed it was just outside one of the very tall and narrow windows.

He inserted the key and opened the door wide, wincing as it squealed shrilly. Almost automatically, he put a protective arm around Hazel and held her very close. For the first time in days, he was not aware of the fact that he had a bad heart.

"Here we go," Brandon said in a low voice.

HE AND HAZEL entered the tiny foyer, made the sharp turn in almost utter darkness. Suddenly Brandon drew her back and to one side. Curtis kept on going, giving Brandon a peculiar glance as if he wondered why he hadn't retained the lead.

The very low doorway was just ahead. Curtis ducked under it. Brandon pulled Hazel's head down, so she'd clear the low arched entrance. They were inside the tomb now, all staring almost awe-stricken at the deep pur-

ple light that filled the gruesome room.

"I know lots of places I'd rather be than here," Hazel whispered. "Is-is that where he-he—?"

"It's the spot." Brandon inclined his head in the direction of the crypt. "I wonder if he sleeps well for thinking what all this cost him?"

"Shh!" Hazel hushed him as if the dead man could hear the lack of compliments to his memory. "After all, he is dead."

"Yes," Curtis whispered, "at least we're very sure of that. Now what do we do?"

Brandon let go of Hazel and walked to within a dozen yards of the crypt. He stopped short, remembering what had happened to Nesbit. He wasn't really sure what had happened, but he knew he did not want it to occur to him, nor to Hazel.

He looked searchingly for any signs of the Blue Angel, but only that much deeper shade of purple illuminated the place after a fashion. There was more darkness than light.

"Look here," Curtis seemed impatient with the whole business, "you brought us here and for what? If you have any ideas, let's have 'em and you might give us a hint as to what we're looking for."

Brandon said, "All right, I will. You worked for the law firm which handled my grandfather's affairs. You know he was considered a very wealthy man, yet when this house of the dead was erected, it seemed to take every penny he owned. He left nothing. Hazel, did your father ever give the slightest hint as to what this place really cost?"

"He said, one time, that it cost several hundred thousand dollars. Your grandfather, it seemed, wanted stout protection in death."

"Exactly. Several hundred thousand dollars. Yet he was worth much more than that—what happened to the surplus? Curtis, would you say my theory is correct?"

"I—don't know," Curtis acknowledged. "It does seem as though he had more money than that. Yes, I'd

say you were on the right track. Bill, do you think he interred a lot of money in here with him?"

"As I have said," Brandon stated coolly, "my grandfather loved money for money's sake alone. Not for what it would buy or the good he might have done with it. It was not beyond him to do what the masterminds say can't be done. Namely, to take his money with him in death."

For the first time Curtis showed a trace of avidity in his eyes.

"Then you assume the money is hidden somewhere in this tomb. I've thought that too, but where is it? Your grandfather hired one of the best contractors of our day to build this tomb. He paid plenty—which wasn't like him at all. He must have received his money's worth. The stuff is pretty well hidden."

"It will probably take a ton of dynamite to open up the cache," Brandon said slowly, "unless—"

"Unless what?" Curtis asked quickly.

"Reason it out," Brandon said. "If he did hide a lot of cash here, some of the niches in the wall would be as good a place as any. Or, perhaps, under this marble floor. Yet such hiding places could be searched. However, suppose you were planning to hide a lot of cash. Money you didn't want anybody else to enjoy. The likeliest spot would be right there."

Brandon pointed straight at the crypt, fifteen yards directly ahead.

"I'M BEGINNING to see," Curtis said. "Obviously any crook looking for the stuff wouldn't molest a crypt. Wouldn't want to see the face of a man dead for five years staring up at him. Brandon, you knew all along the money was hidden in that crypt. Yet you were too foolishly honest to go get it. Well, I'm not. I'll get it, do you hear me?"

"Even if you hadn't said a word, I'd have heard you," Brandon snapped. "You knew, right after my grandfather died, that he'd converted all his

holdings into cash. You worked for the law firm which handled all the details. You quit there and got yourself another job. That of warming up to me so that someday I'd slip and tell you where the money was hidden. You worked at your profession only enough to give you a scant living."

"I've starved," Curtis admitted ruefully, "but it was worth it. Listen, stupid, over half a million lies hidden in that crypt. I sent Nesbit to trail you when you came here. I had a couple of other boys trail you after you killed Nesbit. You led them to the girl who sent that note—Hazel. That was all I needed."

"I didn't kill Nesbit," Brandon said. "The Blue Angel did."

"Blue Angel," Curtis scoffed. "A farce right from the beginning. I put that small Blue Angel on the desk in your house. I didn't try to draw the cops away as you suggested, because I knew the estate as well as you did. I slipped up to the house where I had an amplifier rigged. It was I who did that talking—that warning which I knew darned well would whet your appetite enough so you'd open the mausoleum tonight."

"Why don't you take your right hand from behind your back and show us the gun?" Brandon said softly. "I know you've got one. I also know you were in this tomb before. Probably you dragged Nesbit's body away before I returned with a policeman."

Curtis shrugged. "Guess work, but I admit it. Why not? Neither of you will leave here alive. You'll be entombed with the old man. I'll open one of those niches and seal both of you inside. You'll never be found."

"I wish," Hazel said, "he didn't have a gun. I'd punch him. Bill, the truth now. There was no Blue Angel. You made that story up because I put it in the note."

Very solemnly Brandon said, "There was a Blue Angel and it killed Nesbit. I didn't have a chance with that gunman. He was all nerves and brainy, but he couldn't fight some-

thing that existed only as a spectre. There is a Blue Angel. I saw it."

Curtis laughed. "You're trying to scare me off. You're working on a shoestring just like when you guessed I took Nesbit out of here."

"Remember when we entered this place?" Brandon asked. He had reached down and was clasping Hazel's hand firmly. "I let you go first. You went through the little foyer and then you ducked automatically to avoid banging your head on that low door. Only someone who'd been here before—and banged his head—would have remembered to duck. I knew you'd been in the tomb before."

Curtis rubbed his forehead. "All right, I did get a nasty bump. You can't see anything in this light. Stand over there, both of you. I'm going to open that crypt."

CURTIS unbuttoned his coat and disengaged a kit of tools well concealed by being strapped to his body. They fell with a clatter on the floor. He picked up a short-handled, narrow-headed hammer and a chisel.

"If you move, I'll kill you," he warned. "Maybe we can make a deal after I find the stuff. Your silence for your life and the girl's. I get the money. I'll put the gun on top of the crypt where I can grab it before you even get set. I won't be tricked like Nesbit was."

"Want to bet?" Brandon asked.

Curtis made a derisive sound with his lips, grasped the tools and backed toward the crypt. Hazel cried out. The purple light grew brighter or lighter in tone. Around the crypt formed the outlines of an angel in blue.

Curtis sensed what was happening, but he meant to go through with it anyhow. He kept on backing up into the glow of the Blue Angel and his face was ashen. The gun he held wobbled badly.

"It's some kind of a trick," he yelled. "You did it, Brandon. So help me, I'll kill you for this."

"A shot in here might be heard out-

side," Brandon said. "You'd better get the money first, but don't pass the word around Hades that I didn't warn you. There is a Blue Angel. Wait! Smell the perfume of flowers? Funeral flowers. Feel cool air seeping through here? The Blue Angel is here, Curtis. You'd better drop that gun and call the whole thing off."

"Not me," Curtis shrieked. "I shadowed you for five years for this moment. I'm opening the crypt."

He was beside the dull metallic surface of the crypt now. He reached over and laid the gun on its surface. Instantly, the Blue Angel darted across the floor and took up its position on the further wall.

Hazel screamed. Curtis didn't hear her. He was already sagging to the floor. The tools he held fell with a terrific clatter.

Brandon stepped forward very fast, seized Curtis by one arm and dragged him away from the crypt. Then he mopped his forehead.

"It's not hard to explain," he told Hazel. "I'd have told Curtis if he'd given me the chance. I warned him enough. That crypt becomes charged with electricity when anyone approaches it. There is a sensitive mechanism under these marble slabs that turns on the juice. It comes from that torch my grandfather had built beside the tomb. The current that lights it is tapped somewhere. After the lightning strikes, it takes a few seconds for the mechanism to adjust itself, so I was safe in hauling what was left of Curtis away."

"My father built that?" Hazel gasped.

"He helped," Brandon said. "It's a killing machine, but I doubt he knew exactly what it was all about. My grandfather hired him for the details, because he thought your father was about to die and the secret would die with both of them. Your father must have suspected and tried to tell you."

"But the Blue Angel—it's gone!"

"I figured it out," Brandon said. "When the mechanism works, one of

those windows opens a trifle and presents a slanted side toward the light. It probably works by day too. When light is thrown upon it at this certain angle, the stained glass throws off the silhouette of the Blue Angel.

"First on the floor, as a warning. Then it shifts up to the wall and stays there until the mechanism adjusts itself. The cool air came from that partially opened window. The flowery perfume is from the cemetery bushes and flowers seeping in through the same space."

"And you knew Curtis was trying to get this money?"

"Not until that gunman, Nesbit, told me it didn't make much difference if he killed me, because my heart would probably finish me off soon anyhow. The only person, besides the doctors, who knew about my heart was Curtis. I had to let him go ahead with his scheme, but I did hope he wouldn't be killed. So long as he kept a gun on us, I couldn't save him."

Hazel took his arm. "Let's get out of here. Bill, if your grandfather was eccentric enough to bury his money with him, it must be here. That makes you a rich man."

Brandon nodded. "I'm glad I had to go through all of this. I'm really happy. Partly because I met you."

"Bill Brandon," Hazel said sharply, "are you going the way of your grandfather? Do you worship money so much as to make even the death of Curtis worth while so long as you get the money?"

"Not by a long shot," Brandon grinned as they passed through the cemetery gate. "I'm not even thinking of the dough. Wouldn't be able to use it for a long time anyway. It's this heart of mine. If it stood up under all this strain, those doctors must have been off balance the day they examined me."

"We'll call the police, straighten it all out and get some nice big headlines in the newspapers. I'll make the reporters bring out the fact that I'm supposed to be half-dead from heart trouble and yet I survived this."

Hazel said, misty eyed. "Those doctors will have to reverse themselves. I almost wish they wouldn't, Bill. Ever since I was a girl and used to see you with your grandfather, I—I guess I was in love with you even if you never noticed me."

"But I did," Brandon said gayly. "I did, Hazel. That pink dress, the time you had your hair cut. Then that party dress you were wearing when your father brought you to the house one time. Only then I seemed so much older. Now—well, that's changed. Sure, I'm going to war if they'll have me, but I'll come back."

"I know you will," Hazel said firmly.

"Where the blazes," Brandon asked, "is a cop? When I was trying to keep out of their way, they were around in droves. Come on. We'll find a telephone before someone blunders in there and finds the Blue Angel my grandfather manufactured to scare people away from his money."



Win the War in '44!
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See Here, Flatfoot Hinkey!

By Joe Archibald



War was sure tough when that nitwit Alvin Hinkey had to be graduated from sniping bananas as a harness bull to snooping crime clues as a sleuth. For when Hinkey made his next slip-up, it wasn't on a banana peel, but on a slip of evidence that the dope used as his ticket for a slay-ride.

Corporal Louis Garfinkle
c/o Post Office
New York, N. Y.

DEAR LOUIE:

I see by the papers that you and the rest of the U. S. Army is poundin' beats in the streets of Naples and I guess that is a lot different than poundin' one with me on the West Side back home, ain't it, Louie? Well, I would be with you, and you know it, if I had not got into the brawl with that crook in the alley back of Schnouzer's delicatessen on Tenth and got that wallop on the ear which busted a drum.

Eva told me you got stripes and I says to her, pay me the five, as I bet you would be in Leavenworth before Fats Goering got another medal. She got sore and what do you see in her, Louie?

Well, I got promoted too, as I am now a detective in plain clothes and am working with our old pal Ham-bone Noonan until I learn all the ropes. Noonan says hello and please not git killed as you owe him dough. He was down to Army headquarters last week seein' if he could garnish your pay an' I says that is helpin' the Axis. Noonan says that was the trouble with the last war, everybody bein'

too willin' to forgit debts. But Noonan is dumb, Louie. He thinks an artery is where they hang oil paintin's.

But let me tell you. I am sittin' as pretty as Hayworth with the D.A., as on my first case I did a piece of detecting work that they say will go down in the annuals of crime, Louie.

It all started when I went into Stacy's with Noonan to help him pick out a new washboard for his wife. Who is at a counter but Luella Lusk, the doll who used to be the pin-up for the boys of the Eleventh Avenue Athletic and Social Club. You remember we always wondered where she got the lettuce for the clothes she wore until Noonan grabbed her for shopliftin' in Saxe's. She beat the rap with a mouth-piece who told the jury she was more to be pitied than scorned as she had kleptomania.

"Well," Noonan says to Luella, "how many compacts, necklaces, an' silver plates have you under your camisole this time, huh?"

"Look," the dame says. "The man-power situation is awful, flatfoot, but if not one man besides you survives the war, I will apply for a convent. I have reformed, but I'll admit with cops like you around I git tempted at times. Beat it."

"Come on, Noonan," I says. "Maybe she is cured."

"Yeah, of cliptomania, Alvin?" the flatfoot sniffs. "I have seen patients git relapses. If I owned a piano store an' she come in, I would git nervous."

"In just one minute, junior," Luella says, "I will blitz you with this handbag, and I just purchased a big jar of vitamin tablets which is inside."

"For two cents I would have her searched," Noonan snaps, and I have to laugh, Louie. Luella is beginning to be a better-looking dish than ever, the kind that should never be rationed. She wears a tight black dress but short. It was silly to think she could even conceal a grain of rice on her person.

The salesgirl comes and shows Luella a slip which is a very pretty

orchid color. Luella says she will take it and opens her reticule and pulls out some bills.

"Now I have seen everythin'," Noonan says to me. "Unlest it is a Willkie button at a Jefferson dinner, Alvin. Let us go an' pick out the washboard."

"I bet Mrs. Noonan would like a satin slip instead, Noonan," I tells him.

"You mind your business," the Irishman says.

IT IS three days later a terrible crime is committed which shows you there has to be fellers like me left to guard the home front. Here is the way it happened, Louie.

It is about nine in the P.M. when me and Hambone git the word that a rhubarb has taken place uptown in and about a snatzy apartment house. We burn a lot of vital fuel and git up there. What do we see but a policeman gittin' an auto blanket put over him.

"The crook escaped," a rookie cop says fast. "The guy from Giffany's is inside the lobby there, out like last year's Chris'mas candles. Poor Mike threw a shot at the criminal before he stopped one, Noonan."

We go into the lobby of the swank caravanserai, Louie, and there is a very nicely dressed citizen getting picked up by two internes from a healery. An M.D. says the casualty is Gabriel Snaff and was connected with some big jewelers downtown, like the cop said.

It seems a character with plenty of happy cabbage lived in the hotel. His wife was havin' an anniversary, so he sent down to Giffany's to have a guy bring some trinkets he could look over. Me and Noonan find out Snaff was packin' a brooch an' a necklace worth about fifteen thousand fish all together.

"That is a lot of govern mint, Hambone," I says as we take a gander at the murder scene. "Some smart crooks was tipped off that Snaff was comin' here, huh?"

"Why, of courst not," Noonan sniffs and you know how nasty he can git. "The killer carried a weejee board."

Snaff was nearly shoved through death's door, so is no use to us. The M.D.'s claim Gabriel won't blow his horn maybe for a month, maybe never, as he was boffed with a very blunt instrument of the kind that is not stuffed with goose feathers. Noonan has the place photografted and all, then we start workin' in and about the hotel.

First we go upstairs and quiz a character who pays the bite for a duplex apartment and his name is Bertram H. McWhinney. He has a wife and also a maid who is quite an eyeful, Louie. She has an axcent and calls me and Hambone "Messewers."

"I don't know nothin' about it," McWhinney says. "I expected Snaff to come here. Then I heard a shot out in the street an' figgered it was a blow-out. What is the matter with business people like Giffany's? They would send a guy carryin' a pound of steak through a forest full of starvin' wolves, an' give him nothin' but an orange stick to protect him. Well, I guess the stuff was insured, huh?"

"I wonder if the cop was," Noonan snaps. We go down and talk to a dusky switchboard operator, who is still almost my complexion, he got scared that much. He is the first eye witness we grill. The guy says Snaff got out of the elevator and was passin' a big rubber plant on his way to the exit when a character snipes him. He socks Snaff, grabs the dazzling doodads, and scrams. A tenant happens to be coming in, sees the underworld commando at work, and starts yellin' his head off for the cops.

"Tha's all I see, boss," the little flunkie gulps out. "Then the crook is gone. He swaps shots outside with the cops an' comes out the winnah. I couldn't describe the gen'leman if I seed him ag'in, boss. Nossuh!"

"That is a big help, Alvin," Hambone says to me. "We are on our own.

Let's see how good a slewfoot you are, Hinkey."

"No clues," I says. "In books they always leave somethin', Noonan. Well, I always found out the least of the suspects was guilty, so maybe we could find out who it is and arrest him or her. How about Mrs. McWhinney?"

"Oh, brother," Noonan says. "War is hell, Alvin. It made you a detective. Come on, but keep out from underfoot."

There are no clues in the lobby. I hoped maybe the killer wore rubber heels an' left a print, Louie, but there is thick carpet on the floor anyway, so what? We go outside. In the crowd is a tenant who had a seat up front. The guy says he didn't get a good look at the assassin, as he made a dive under a parked car when the crook started shootin' it out with the cop.

"You don't git purple hearts for riskin' your neck at home," the citizen says and he had somethin' there, Louie.

WE ANKLE around in the vicinity of the hotel for over an hour, covering the block on each side of it. It is Noonan who finds the spots on the sidewalk in front of a vacant cleanin' an' dyein' store.

"There, Alvin," Hambone says. "The cop nicked the killer, an' the blood didn't start droppin' until he run this far. This ain't catsup, Alvin. We'll trail him where he went to."

We run out of gore another block to the north, Louie. Noonan stops two feet from the curb and points to the last drop of blood. "He got into a car here, Alvin. Somebody waited here to pick him up, as this spot is out of sight of the entrance to Shoulder Arms. What we gotta do is find out the description of the car an' the license number—"

"Won't that be hard, Noonan?" I asks. "Who has the license number?"

"Nobody ast you, Alvin," Hambone snaps very testily. "Le's see if we can find some tire marks. No use, as it looks like there was no more tread on

them tires than there is Eyetalian colonies in Africa. We got t' depend on the fences, Alvin. The crook will have to git rid of the hot baubles sooner or later, an' the best fences are here in the big burg. Why is it eye witnesses never see nothin', Alvin?"

Me and Noonan git nowheres, Louie, so we call it a day when midnight comes around. It is the next morning when me and Noonan are with the D.A. gettin' insulted that a call comes in. When the D.A. hangs up, he says it looks like we have a lead on the big jewel robbery and to go uptown and see a Doctor Elmo Otterbein.

We enter a croaker's office just twenty-five minutes later. A swell-lookin' nurse is dabbin' a compress on Doctor Otterbein's noggin. The M.D. is a bald-headed fat little character and is burning like a newlywed's first cookies.

"What happened?" Noonan asks the doc.

"Huh? You are detectives?"

"There, there, Doctor," the nurse says. "Nothin' is what it should be today. Instead of butter we git oleo and—"

"Yeah," Otterbein sniffs and takes another aspirin. "I am in here late last night and a couple walks in. A man and a woman an' the woman has a heavy veil over her face. The man had a blue handkerchief over the lower part of his. He stuck a gun in my stummick and says he wants first aid quick, or else. What would you of done?"

"Give him first aid," I says. Noonan says for me to shut up, Louie.

"You are not kiddin', boys," the M.D. says. "They was desperate characters, so I go to work on the wound in the male's arm. It was a bullet wound, but the slug didn't go near the bone. It was bleedin' a lot though and the patient was gripin' like a three-year-old. When he took off his coat, there was a tourniquet just above his elbow. Huh, he never would of bled to death, but if he had waited another

ten minutes, that tourniquet would of given him gangrene."

"Where's the bullet?" Noonan asks. Then to me he says, "So's we'll know if it come out of the cop's gun, Alvin. Remember all I tell you now."

"The bullet must have gone right through," the M.D. says.

"So all this time you waited t' call us, hah?" Noonan fires at the croaker.

"That's right," Otterbein sniffs. "I don't never keep a phone in a closet, you big jerk. I was knocked cockeyed, then tossed in the closet an' the door locked on me. I am sorry I was not Houdini on your account, flatfoot."

"Describe 'em," Noonan says.

The M.D. tells us what kind of clothes the two were wearing, Louie, but I pointed out to Noonan that by this time they would have peeled them off an' burned them or something. Hambone says he wants no advice from me, not until I have put in ten years huntin' crooks like he has.

"I just tried to help," I says to the fathead. "Okay, I will button up, Noonan." I take a chair, Louie, and let the big bum show how smart he is.

Then I see something on the floor right by my chair and reach down and pick it up. I am afraid Noonan will hear my ticker revvin' up, so I button my topcoat quick. I says to myself it is funny Noonan would not ask for a certain thing, but you have seen Mel Ott take a third one without movin' his bat. Anyway, Noonan muffs one and I keep my place where he put me, Louie.

"Still gettin' nowheres," Hambone finally says. "Why didn't you pull off his mask, Doc?"

"Why, it was silly of me, wa'n't it?" Otterbein says. "I don't believe the dame would have shot me if I had. I should of taken the chance, Noonan, even though she kept the howitzer close to my back all the time I was workin'."

"Awright, no sourcasm," Noonan snaps.

"An' they didn' pay me," Otterbein says.

"Come on, Alvin. We got to take a chancet they will wear them same clothes ag'in, it looks like. It was the killer awright, but all's we know is he has got two legs and wore a brown suit an' a green hat. This is a toughie, Alvin."

"Maybe I oughta tell you what I got so far, Noonan. Sittin' there in the chair—"

"Don't make me laff, Alvin."

Well, he ast for it, Louie. What I picked up was the tourniquet the doll must have put on the rough citizen's arm to stop his bleedin'. It was just right for a tourniquet as it was very thin satin cloth, Louie. That stuff knots up tight.

What got me was that it was a pretty ortchid color just like the color of the slip Luella Lusk bought in Stacy's whilst me and Noonan needled her. Of courst, Louie, it was one chancet in a hundred it come off Luella's slip.

HAMBONE goes back downtown and I foller him. The D.A. fustens to what Noonan says and then threatens to shake up the whole department.

"Noonan, you could not track down a lame moose if it got into the Polo Grounds after a three inch snowfall. You could only catch a cold accidentally. What kind of a home front you think we will have if these outrages are allowed to keep up? Giffany might have put that seventy-five grand in war bonds if McWhinney had sold the trinkets. You are a menace to the four freedoms, Noonan."

"Eisenhower don't take a beach-head over night," Hambone says. "We'll nab those babies, Chief. The crook'll mos' likely have t' git his wound dressed ag'in. Me an' Alvin'll surround Otterbein's office buildin'—"

"If you don't mind," the D.A. says. "Would you please git out of here, Noonan?"

Hambone says he does not feel so good when we get outside. He says he thinks he will go home an' mull things

over. He writes me out the names of three or four fences and where they are in business, and hands the paper to me.

"Just keep moseyin' around those joints until I see you, Alvin," he says.

I go over to Stacy's after Noonan goes into a subway, and buzz a blonde salesgirl. I show her the piece of the slip and she says it come off one that was expensive and she was sure there wasn't many of them bein' sold in town any more.

"They don't make 'em like that no more, Mister Hinkey," she says. "I bet there isn't a dozen in the whole city."

"Then I got one chancet in twelve," I says. "Thanks, sister. What are you doin' when you git through?"

"I graduate from weldin' school tonight," she says. "Then I meet my husband who has just come back from New Guinea after killin' fourteen Japs single-handed. An' I have fits."

"I only ast," I says and hurry out. I never git nowhere with dolls, Louie. I go over to a tavern and have a beer or two, as I am shakin' a little like I did the time you an' me chased the homicided maniac into the dark alley and I'd lost my gun. There is only one thing for me to do, that is go and see Luella an' see if she has an alibi durin' the time of the rubout of Gabriel Snaff.

I GO OVER to the West Side and talk to a landlady. The old babe says Luella up and moved, as she got a spot warbling and snapping photos in a night club and figured the old joint was not good enough. I got the address of the apartment house and Rommelled up there.

When I ring the bell, Luella opens the door quick and then slugs me. I have quite a time pickin' up my marbles. When the lights go on all over the world, I am sittin' in an easy chair and Luella is standing close by wrapped up in a negligay you read about, Louie. She still holds the hand-bag by a strap.

"Oh, pawdon me," Luella says. "I expected a friend an' he—"

"It is awful nice you wasn't sittin' up for an enemy, wa'n't it?" I reply. "Remember me?"

"Your face is familiar," Luella says and lights a cig. "It's been a long time since I was on a scavenger hunt, though. I get it, you flatfoot! You was with Noonan the day—"

"It is a twenty-four buck question an' you got it right," I says gettin' severe. "But the D.A. sponsors this program an' don't pay off unless it is with bracelets. Where was you the night Gabriel Snaff was knocked off? An' what did you do with the veil, Luella?"

"Look, drip! I hate riddles. You want I should have an alibi, huh? Awright, I git to the Golden Heel at eight-thirty sharp and don't leave until two A.M. You want I should take you to my boss and prove it, Fetlock Holmes?"

"If I could induce you," I says.

"Frankly, you couldn't induce a setter dog to hunt for fleas," Luella snaps. "But you wait there until I get a few things on."

"Make it more than justa few," I says. "Or we will git arrested."

Luella picks up some things that fell out of her reticule when she socked me, Louie, and then trips into the powder room. I sit and take a gander around the place and happen to see Luella overlooked somethin'. I git up quick and retrieve it and see that it is a little memo book. I have it in my pocket when the wren appears.

We go to the Golden Heel. Luella knocks me down to a dark-skinned character named Tito Scapola who looks like the president of the Black Hand. I was sure oil splashed when I squeezed his hand. He gives me an alibi for the doll and says he can get at least a dozen customers to back him up.

"To theenk you would suspect a beautiful girl like Luella, Meester cop," he sneers. "Com een sometime an' weel put ze arseenie in ze zombie."

"Nuts to you," I says. I went out and figure I am goin' nowheres fast like Hitler's Luffwoffer, Louie. I ask myself how could Luella put a tourniquet on the assassin's arm if she wasn't ridin' in the getaway chariot? I also says I would have to get up a lot of nerve to ast Luella could I see her laundry when it got back.

I go downtown and tell the D.A. Noonan wasn't feelin' good and went home.

"You couldn't do worse, Hinkey," the Chief says. "Try it on your own."

I do, Louie. I go to a gin mill and look at Luella's memo book. There are all kinds of entries in it, shoppin' lists, telephone numbers, and things. Then I git to a page that bugs my eyes out. Luella has wrote:

Thursday. Mona's birthday. Must get her a nice present. Perhaps a slip.

THERE it was, Louie. Right in my lap. Gabriel Snaff was rubbed out on Friday night. It meant she had had time to get the present from Luella, this Mona dame, and put it on in time for the crime.

But I ask myself where will I find Mona. I do not dare ast Luella, because if she is mixed up in the awful crime, she will smell a rat. So I think of the telephone numbers and start calling them. After seven calls, a doll answers and says she is Mona, and who wants to know?

"Wrong number," I says, thinkin' fast, Louie. I am all of a twitter as I am on the trail. I have the slip the crooks made right in my coat pocket and the telephone number of the frill who got the present from Luella. Right away I go to a telephone exchange and flash my badge.

"I want the name of the person who has this phone," I says to the manager. "I am from headquarters."

I got the name. It is Mona Leesa, Apt. 6B, Tingley Towers, on West One Hundred Ninety-seven. So I sit down and figure what to do next, Louie, as I must get into the doll's flat without incitin' suspicion. I remem-

bered readin' a whodunit oncet, where a dick got into a boudoir by sayin' he was a buildin' inspector, so I go to the Tingley Towers and digs up the super.

"Now look," the guys says. "I run a respectable place and there ain't no crooks here."

"I et a strawberry shortcake oncet," I says. "I found a bug in it. I am the law and you better corporate or it will go hard with you, my man." You got to show you mean business when you are a detective, Louie.

"Okay," the super says. "I will see you get in any apartments you want."

In due time the super taps on 6B and a dame calls out. "Whoozit?" she yelps.

"The superintendent. I won't disturb you for more than a few seconds, Miss Leesa. A man inspectin' the building is all."

I walk in. The super says he must get back downstairs and look after things. "Do that," I says.

Mona is a blonde dish and wears slacks and a sweatêr. You said it, Louie. She has got a pair of glimmers that stab right through anythin' they peep at.

"Afternoon," I says. "I just want to ast you a question or two. The super says I was an inspector an' maybe I will see you condemned. Ha, let's git to the point as—"

"Sit down, pal!"

It was not Mona said it, Louie. I didn't, so I turn around. There is a very mean-looking taxpayer standing in a doorway. He has a cannon in his fist and I know it is not filled with jelly beans. Mona seems as surprised as me.

"Now, what makes you so nervous, huh?" I choke out. Then I see the guy has one arm in a sling.

"Smart baby, ain't you?" the vicious-looking guy says. "What's that stickin' out of your pocket, buildin' inspector? Grab it, Mona. Cripes, what made us forget it?"

Louie, I take a quick look. The piece of lingerie is hanging out of my coat pocket. Imagine it, me with a ship

showin'! Mona snatches it loose and I try to yell for help, but my throat is as moist as a camel's back.

"So the croaker called the cops and you found that piece of stuff there, hah?" the guy says. "Well, it is lucky you brought it, huh? But you know too much now, don't you, punk?"

The dame frisks me of my Betsy before I can answer. "I know you shot the cop," I says. "Where is the jewelry?"

Mona laughs. Then she says, "But how would he know I was wearin' that slip, Itzy?"

"I don't git it either, Babe," Itzy bites.

"You both will," I says, indignant. "Maybe I will have the chair done over in creton for the dame after you are braised, Itzy. You might just as well give up."

"With you snuffed out," Itzy says. "I don't see who could hand us a rap. We got exhibit A which is the stuff I had wrapped around my arm."

"So Luella had nice friends as usual," I says.

"If that babe squealed," Itzy barks. "She gits it next after this squirt, Mona."

"How could she? She didn't know nothin' about it. Even if she read in the papers, Itzy, that a piece of a girl's slip was found in the doc's office—there are other dolls wearin' slips. And anyway it wa'n't in the papers. What'll we do?"

"Go git the boiler and bring it around," Itzy says. "This slug has got to be knocked off. We'll dump him where they won't find him for awhile."

They are goin' to kill me, Louie. At first it does not sink in. I try to wake up, but find I am not dreamin'. Goose bumps the size of tokay grapes sprout all over me. They know I know they are the guilty criminals, and who wants to fry?

MONA goes out and Itzy says for me to sit tight and not move. If I'd had any brains, Louie, I would have let the super of the joint in on

more than I did. It was what I get, I gripe, for holdin' out on Noonan.

"Too bad you was a 4F," Itzy says with a very wolfish grin. "You would of had more chance against the Nutsies or Jappos, flatfoot. Which do you prefer, shootin' or a shiv under your ribs?"

"The police will never stop until they git you, Itzy," I gulp out. "Crime don't pay, an' just remember, you can't name one crook who didn't come to a bad end."

"I got fifteen grand," Itzy says, "to say I will be different, copper. Hello, Mona, everythin' ready?"

"Yeah, but we better not drive him too far as we ain't got but one coupon left," the doll says. Louie, you think all cold-blooded crooks are where you are, huh? Well, we got worst than the Nazis right here.

"Okay, let's start movin'," Itzy says. "I better take off this sling as I don't never need it anyways."

"Yeah," the cookie yips at Itzy, "if you wa'n't such a sissy, you wouldn't have made me take you to that croaker. You wasn't bleedin' enough to—look what you almost did, you jerk!"

"Shut up or I'll bust you one," Itzy yelps. "You are in deep, sister, so you better make this job a nice clean one. Just walk along and act like you was our friend, copper. One peep outa you and you will know right away what all the ministers have been guessin' at for years."

It looks like curtains, Louie. They march me out of the apartment, into the elevator, out of the buildin', and into a jalopy. There is a smell inside the boiler that reminds me of lilies that grow in a valley.

"You drive careful now, Mona," Itzy sniffs. "Head towards Mount Vernon an' go through the park. That's where I give it to the bum."

It is just like they was only talkin' about drownin' a cat, Louie. How can citizens git so blazzay? I had to think as I was that desperate. Nothin' come to me until we are stopped at a light. Right outside the car winder is

a great big cop, Louie, not three feet away from me. It is like you are starvin' an' a big steak is just inside a plate glass winder and you can't grab it. Then I sees the light before the red one goes on.

"Hello, you big slob of a cop!" I says. "They go draftin' papas with guys like you wearin' monkey suits! You oughter go hide some place, you yeller airdale. You—!"

"Cut it, punk," Itzy yipes and I know he is almost jumpin' out of his skin. Mona says for him to let me have it and she will jump the light. Itzy didn't hear her, because the cop grabs at the door and opens it.

"Git out of that boiler, you big-mouthed bum!" the officer says to me. "You'll wisht you was drafted—"

"I can't," I howl. "They will shoot me. Look, they—"

"Give it to 'im, Itzy, you panty-waist!" Mona screeches and starts up the jalopy. "We're cooked if he—"

"Right in front of the cops?" Itzy yelps. "It is s-s-silly, Mona. Oh, what'll we—?"

"They can't burn you only oncet," Mona yells, then I hear the sirens howling. It is when Itzy turns around to look to see how close the cops was that I grabbed the Roscoe away from him and belted him in the chops.

Was that fast thinkin', Louie? But wait. The gendarmes behind start shootin'. A slug comes through the rear winder and knocks the Betsy right out of my mitts. Itzy and me scramble for it. Itzy bites almost half of my left ear off and I let go the cannon. He is pressing it against my short-ribs when a tire blows. Noonan was sure right about the treads on the murder boiler's tires, Louie.

The jalopy throws a fit and I fall on top of Itzy, who by instinct pulls the trigger. The bullet misses me and goes through the front seat, but low. Mona lifts a foot off the seat and screams like she sat in a mouse nest.

Of courst no car, not even a jeep, has an automatic pilot. The boiler skids off the street, climbs a sidewalk,

and goes into a Greek's fruit and vegetable market. It is an awful crash.

When I am able, I get off the hood of the boiler and wipe orange juice out of my eyes. I see Itzy hanging out of the car window and Mona seems to have disappeared. We find her later under seven bunches of bananas.

"Eet ees sabotage," the storekeeper says.

"Yeah," I gulp. "We do this ten times a day, Pollapoolas. How long do you think our campaign will last? Don't be silly."

Well, the cops take over. The biggest one says he is goin' to knock me around a little bit before he runs me in.

"Look, here is my badge," I says, wipin' some cantaloupe meat off it. "I am Alvin Hinkey, detective. They was takin' me for a ride and it was not pleasure drivin'. This is Itzy and he knocked off Giffany's legman and stole fifteen grand worth of sparkling gadgets. Wait, I got an address here. We better go back an' search the joint."

Louie, we found the Giffany specials in the fake bottom of one of Mona's

suitcases. It seems Mona used to do a lot of shopliftin' with Luella, as they was pals. Only Luella did not know Mona had not reformed like she had. I am glad she was not an excessory as I think I can git her to like me sometime. It was some present Luella give Mona, huh? Crooks have to look out for them slips.

Noonan won't speak to me, Louie. He says I am a dirty double-crosser an' a two-timin' rat. Of courst he always was the jealous type.

Well, I hope you are okay, Louie. I git a guilty conscience sometimes thinkin' of all the danger you are in and me in such a safe job back home. Give them Nutsies what for, Louie, and if you git to Venice, don't git bit by a gondola. Write if you git a chancet to stop over for repairs on that tank. I saw Eva with a sailor yesterday, not that I mean t' worry you none. Well, I will close now as I got to go on a radio program at eight and tell how I solved the murder. As ever,

Alvin.

P.S. I can't git over it, Louie. Imagine me with a slip showin'!

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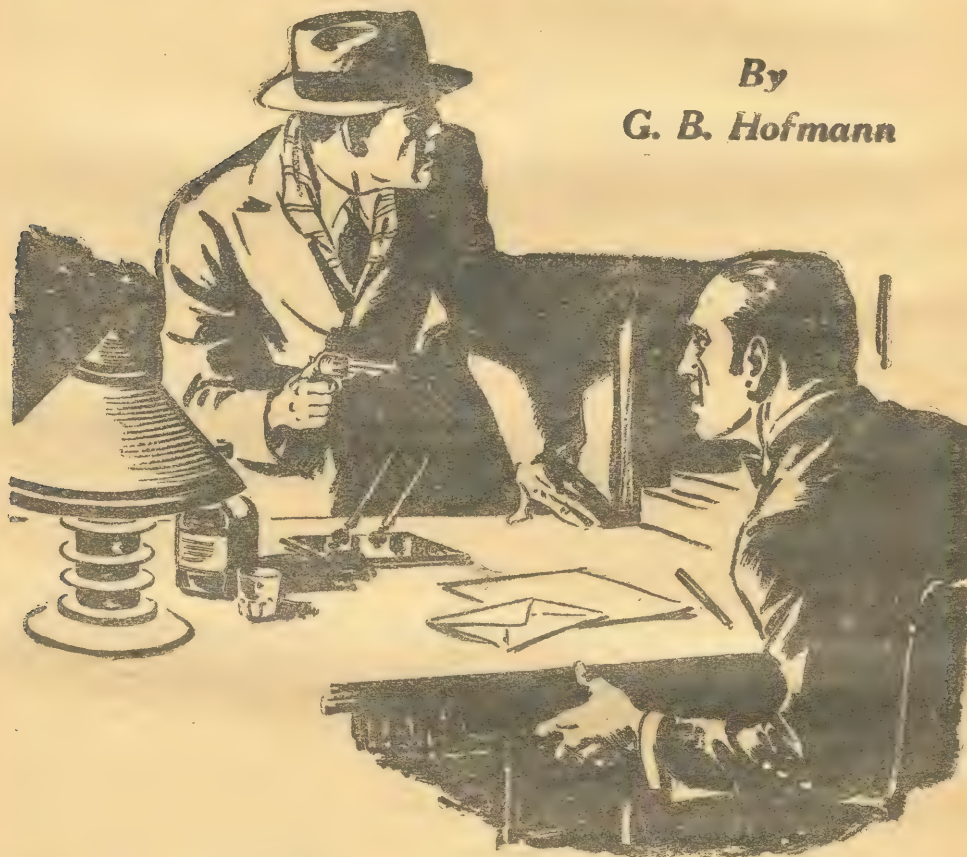
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Leo Derillo was going to die, because it was all figured out that way. Every angle was covered—every angle except the impossible one where . . .

The Corpse Squealed

By
G. B. Hofmann



MIKE DERILLO came in. I looked at the clock. "You're early," I said.

He nodded. He was shaky. He needed a drink. Mike looked at anything but my eyes.

"Leo in?" he mumbled thickly.

"Y'got an appointment, ain't you? Sure he's in. So sit down."

He hesitated. "Sit down!" I said in the way I got that scares 'em.

He backed into a chair. "Yeah, sure, Rod, sure," he said.

I looked at the clock again. About

time Jiggs Clapper was comin' out of Leo's office. I looked over at Mike and I laughed inside. In a couple minutes Mike is gonna commit a murder. He's gonna go in there and kill his brother—and he don't know it! If that ain't a laugh, I ask you!

I got it all fixed. Every single angle, in and out and all around, has been checked and double-checked. A perfect setup. I been plannin' for this for a hell of a long time. I got a talent for details.

An hour ago Leo Derillo came into

the office. Gees, but that guy griped me! He got me so sore there were times I could brain him where he stood. I picked up the morning mail and handed it to him.

I said nice and cheerful, "Good mornin', Boss," and what did I get? A dirty look while he snapped the mail out of my hands. He marched into his office without a word. I was glad to see he wasn't feelin' so good! Too much football game and liquor yesterday.

Maybe if he had been a little nice to me, who knows? But I was sick to death of bein' treated like a dog!

It says on the expensive seein' eye doors outside in the classy reception room that these are the offices of Leo Derillo, Enterprises. What our racket was don't enter into the matter. Take my word for it, it wasn't legal and the sugar was heavy.

I was Leo's strongarm. He trusted me. He didn't like me, but he liked the way I'm tough. He liked my guts. But what he didn't know was that I hated his guts!

And in a little while, just a few minutes maybe, I was gonna go in and blast Leo's head wide open. Gees, but it was a pleasure just thinkin' about it!

I reached down into the bottom drawer and brought up a bottle. Mike near flew over to my desk. I let him have a couple snorts, though I'm not supposed to. While he's gulpin' 'em down, inside me I kept sayin' to myself, "Well, Mike? You're gonna bump off your brother in no time at all, how's it feel?"

Crazy talk, but fun. It was almost a shame I couldn't let Mike really do it. Mike hated Leo's guts, too. That's one of the angles I took into consideration.

Mike went back to the chair, feelin' a little better, but he still needed a bottle or so to put him in the pink. Mike is a Derillo, and, oh brother, there's a mess of Derillos around. No guy ever had so many uncles and cousins.

Why, there was a nephew's cousin's nephew, or somethin' or other in that football game yesterday. Gees, you'd of thought the nephew was makin' football history just because he almost practically as good as made a touchdown. Leo went nuts, he near tore the box down, because those other guys wouldn't let his relative make the All American.

Gees, y'd think these Derillos was somebody! I personally, privately and completely, hate the guts of every Derillo there is.

Now, Mike over there is the black sheep. They say to Mike, pull yourself together, stop this drinkin' and be like the rest of us wonderful nice clean Derillos. If it wasn't for Mike, who the hell could they be superior to, except me! None of them is so hot to look at. Take Leo. This racket he was in didn't exactly set him up as a model of society.

WHAT I hate most of all is Tilly Derillo. I like to call her Tilly, because it burns her up. She's been in' class for years. Livin' in the best places. Three husbands to the good, the fourth sucker comin' up. She's doin' her stretch in Reno these days.

I hate her because she's beautiful. So beautiful I near bust everytime I see her. Lookin' at her you'd think she was an angel just tryin' to have a little fun.

I caught her looking at me, when she thought I wasn't lookin'. Sizing me up at first, then later maybe because she liked me. She liked the way I was tough too.

She said to me, "I bet you wouldn't be half so tough if you didn't carry a rod!"

That was the bunk. She knew it too. But she likes to tease me about the rods, like I tease her about Tilly. She made a monkey out of me one time, but I fixed her wagon. I'll never forget. I come to her house. She had a present she wanted me to bring to Leo. She is nuts about Leo, who is

twice as nuts about her. Nothin's too good for his daughter, and Tilly agrees with him.

I tripped and fell. She laughed her head off. I got all nuts inside. I sprang to my feet and smashed the laugh off her face. Then I grabbed her and kissed her. Her mouth always did drive me nuts. I wasn't exactly tender either, if you know what I mean. She liked it, too. Don't worry. She wasn't the type that gets a kick out of tenderness. She was as good as mine until she remembered her station in society.

"Lemme go, yuh lug!" she yelled. Tilly can get tough too. "I oughta bust yuh one for this!"

She was scared she would get to like me too much. In her eyes I'm a palooka and she isn't having any. She was so scared she'd like me she told Leo I was makin' passes. I hadda let that little fat tub of lard knock me around a little, because I work for him. I'm twice his size, and could have squashed him like he was a bug.

I don't like thinking of Tilly. I get too excited. But little Tilly is another angle of my scheme.

Y'see, in the letters I handed Leo this morning was one from Tilly. From Reno. Leo and Tilly write to each other so often you'd think they was mushy about one another.

Why am I gonna kill Leo? That I don't like his guts or Tilly's guts should be enough. I put guys on the spot I didn't hate half so much. That ain't it. I wanna take over the organization. Leo cancelled, Mike in the chair, will drop this little business in my lap.

Leo's been gettin' old and a little careless. He don't know that I been runnin' this racket over his head for years. All the boys come to me, automatic. Leo's too busy spendin' his dough to take care of makin' it.

Everybody knows I can take over. That's why I hadda kill Leo clean. I coulda mowed him down a million times, but I didn't want anyone to point the finger on me.

THE door of Leo's office opened and Jiggs Clapper come out. Mike near jumped out of his skin. The door clicks shut after Jiggs. I didn't want him to stay in the office a minute longer than he should. I didn't want him to talk to Mike. Jiggs said hello to Mike, and Mike said the same.

I led Jiggs to the door, let him into the outer office, locked the door after him. No appointment for ten minutes at least. This was the zero hour.

I had my back to Mike. I took out gloves, put them on quick. I pressed down the key to the speaker and said, "It's Mike."

He ticked the buzzer that opened the door. I walked in.

He was sitting at his desk. He was readin' a letter. Tilly's letter. I could see it and smell it. The briefcase Jiggs Clapper had left was there. Leo looked up. I had the rod in my hand. He started and stared at the gun. His eyes popped and he looked at me.

When he saw the look on my face, he went white to the lips and made a funny scratching noise deep in his throat. Like his voice was stuck and he was tryin' to tell me not to shoot.

I wasted no time. I let him have it between the eyes. He died in seconds. He sagged. Blood spread from the bullet-hole down his face like little black-red branches. He slumped to the floor.

The gun was Leo's. It had a Maxim. The room was sound-proof. I figured on every angle!

I like killing people. It makes me feel good, like I could lick the whole damned world. Makes me feel hot in my chest, and put seltzer water in my veins like I was very thrilled.

I put the gun in my pocket. I saw that Leo was dead by puttin' my cigarette case to his mouth for breath. Bull's eye. From now on it's up to the undertakers.

Now to work, for my alibi. The dictaphone was right behind Leo's chair. There was a new roll on it.

I saw he was about to answer Tilly's letter. Another angle.

Y'know, you'd bust out laughin' the way Leo loved that dictaphone. If I caught him listenin' to his voice once, I caught him a thousand times. He never got tired of hearin' the repeats, which was nice, since it gave me a good chance to learn his voice. Leo is easy to imitate. In fact I often spoke over the phone to people, sayin' I was Leo. That's part of how I got this racket out from under Leo.

I read Tilly's letter. It had the right date. It also had the same mush she always writes. She's doin' this, and met that party, and got snubbed by this one, and how dear and sweet her prospective husband is to her in her hour of need gettin' parted from her third. Hour of need! That's a hot one. She never had an hour of need in her life.

I had the thing all worked out. I pushed the key to the machine and spoke in Derillo's voice:

"Hello, sweets! Is good to hear from my little baby."

I knew the junk he dishes out; it's like the same stuff Tilly writes him. I spoke a good paragraph full of baloney. Then I come to the main part:

"I am going to buy you a present, my little one. A beautiful. . . . Oh Mike, come on in. . . . where was I? (I raised Leo's voice). Well, don't stand there, you drunken . . . Mike! What's the . . . What you doing with the gun, Mike! Mike . . . don't . . . don't shoot—" I clapped my hands, knocked the dictaphone hard against the arm rest of the chair, let it fall. I let the record run on.

Sweet! I took a key out of Leo's pocket, opened the briefcase, and helped myself to a handful of the money. Just small change. I tipped my head to Leo. "So long, sucker," I said and went back into the office.

It took me exactly two and one half minutes to enter that office and

leave it. If you don't believe it, try it sometime. That's efficiency.

MIKE got out of the chair, gettin' set to ask a guy he hated for a little money. I went over to him. I put the briefcase under his arm.

"Leo wants you to hold on to this for a little while. Bring it back this afternoon sometime." I put ten bucks in his mitt. "Beat it." I picked up his overcoat, slipped the rod and briefcase key in a pocket without him seein'. "Hang on to the briefcase. Don't let nobody see you takin' it out. Just don't lose it."

"I won't," says Mike, a little mixed up he got what he wanted so easy.

"Beat it out of here for all you're worth," I told him, hurryin' him to the door. "There's a customer comin' Leo don't want to—never mind, you just scram!"

He laced it out of the office like a small storm.

I peeled the gloves off my hands and lit a cigarette. My hand shake? The hell it did! I'm used to this sort of thing.

I thought of Tilly and got all nuts inside. Wait'll that baby finds out the green stuff she's been so careless with just ain't gonna rain no more! I'm the guy that'll have it. She's gonna find out her snooty ways ain't good enough for me!

The desk phone rang. Al and Fuller came in.

"What's the matter with Mike?" said Al. "He come out of the office like his pants was on fire."

"I don't know," I laughed back. "He come runnin' out of Leo's office too."

I pushed down the key to the speaker. The arrangement of the office is also another little angle. While I waited for Leo's voice to come through, I chewed the fat with the boys. Al told a good one about a dope in a nudist camp. I busted out laughin'. I kept wriggling the jigger every once in a while, then I made believe

I suddenly see Leo don't answer.

Al bent down and yelled through the speaker Leo should shake a leg. We waited some more.

Fuller said, "Maybe he's sick!"

"Maybe the thing don't work," said Al. "Let's go in."

"We can't," I said. "We can't go in unless Leo pushes the release button on his desk."

Just in case the speaker was on the blink, I said, I went over to the door and knocked. After a while, we all knocked. We didn't know how you could hear because it was solid and sound-proof.

"You sure he's in there?" asked Al.

"Sure I'm sure. Jiggs Clapper went in and so did Mike."

It was no secret Mike and Leo hated each other. "Well, somethin' wrong," Fuller said weakly.

"Yeah." I went back to the desk. I thought a minute, then I took up the phone. Nothin' else to do but call the cops. When I got through, I went and got the fire ax and went to work, choppin' down the door.

WE BROKE the door down about the same time the cops come in. There was Derillo, of course. I looked surprised and shocked. Why I was almost believin' myself Mike did the job.

The cops got the Mike angle pretty soon. I showed how nobody could get in the office after Mike, unless Leo wants. They started askin' me questions; no reason why I couldn't go in there after Mike, was there? I started to look very nervous and scared. Alibis should never be too perfect. I got that angle covered too. I got a little pushin' around, until I noticed the briefcase was missin'.

I called Jiggs Clapper. He said there was about fifty thousand in the case. Al and Fuller said Mike come out and was hidin' somethin' under his overcoat. I said he lammed out of the office so fast, I didn't even notice he carried an overcoat.

They located Mike in about a half hour. He was pretty tanked by then. They found the gun, the briefcase, the key. They got the works and motive.

"You killed Leo!" said one of the dicks.

Mike blinked. "I did?"

"We got the evidence."

"Oh." Mike looked at me and grinned. "Allees menn' t'doot."

When he sobers up, he'll remember and start yellin'. But then he'll sound like a guy tryin' to save his neck by puttin' the blame on me. No law can prove I was in Leo's office. But they can prove Mike was. I'm in the clear. And I'm clean when the detective found the dictaphone.

The cop played it; the Chief played it. They pinned the murder on Mike. They handed me the ear-phones to verify Leo's voice. I listened to it and it sounded so much like Leo, I near died laughin' inside.

They asked Clapper to verify it too. I saw he was pale and shakin' like a leaf. "I remember Leo readin' his daughter's letter, but—I don't understand." He looked at me, like he was scared. "When I was in here, Leo couldn't talk. His voice was gone!"

"What!"

"Yeah, he overstrained his voice at the football game yesterday."

"You're a liar!" I cried out and come up to him. "Maybe you got somethin' to do with this. When Leo come in this morning he spoke to me."

"He couldn't have," Jiggs Clapper said, "and I can prove it." He shoved his hand into his pocket and come up with a pad. "Here! In Leo's own handwriting. When I was in the office, he wrote out what he wanted to say and I answered."

So since he couldn't have made the dictaphone, it wasn't Mike who did it. Any damn fool can figure that out. It was just an angle that I didn't figure on, that's all.

Though Garth shot his hosts in their private mausoleum, their hospitality did not end with death. They proved to him there was . . .

Tomb Enough for All

By John Michel

JASPER GARTH studied the bland face of his host as the maid removed the dishes and brought in the coffee and cakes. All during dinner he had watched that face for signs of recognition, waited and watched in fear that diminished as the dinner progressed; and Barton Clain's charming wife kept the conversational ball rolling cheerily along.

Garth's own face betrayed nothing of the thoughts that raged beneath it with the insane fury of a thunderstorm. Little by little the severe lines had relaxed until now he was almost chuckling. The Clains would attribute it to his personal sense of humor and pat themselves on the back for having nursed it along during dinner, allowing it to mellow and ripen under their benign and friendly influence. How could they know they were jesting with death?

How could they know Garth's real purpose? As he drew two expensive cigars from his waistcoat and passed one to his host, Garth's mind passed like a flash over the events of the last twenty years.

It had started as a business association with Clain's father. Then Garth had been a junior partner in the great chemical trust, knuckling under and kow-towing to the elder Clain. Jealous of his partner's power, smarting

under a series of unfortunate gambling losses to the point where the total loss of his shares in the corporation stared him in the face, Garth had resorted to desperate measures. Seizing upon one of Clain's earlier business indiscretions, he had attempted to blackmail him into turning over the controlling shares.

There had been a struggle in Clain's office. Garth's eyes abruptly shifted to take in the expanse of the great dining room which in the course of twenty years had been converted from the old office. He remembered drawing a gun as the elder Clain advanced on him grimly; remembered the



sudden blast of the weapon and Ellery Clain's eyes, haunted always by the death he had feared from a child, going wide and staring, then dimming out like an extinguished candle.

Even in those days Garth was daring, reckless. He called the police, told them a glib story about Clain's having been murdered by a common burglar. But Barton Clain, the six-year-old son of the magnate, had been found hidden under his father's great desk where he had been playing. The boy had accused Garth. Under a searching examination by the police, the murderer's story collapsed like a house of cards. And there had followed twenty years of a life stretch

in the penitentiary at hard labor.

Now he had escaped, eager to obtain the revenge he had sworn. A desperate man needed no prodding into the proper path of vengeance. Garth had known what to do. It was only a matter of a few hours to accost a driver in the road, kill him, hide the body and drive away with a new identity.

A day later, arriving in New York, he had contacted the Clain heir, now a twenty-six-year-old executive of the corporation. Garth represented himself as an investor eager to pump new money into the concern which was crying for war expansion.

He was sure that Barton Clain would never recognize his father's murderer after twenty years. And he had been right. In the mind of his host there was no connection between "Julian Worth," the name carefully extracted from Dun and Bradstreet, and Jasper Garth.

GARTH smiled, smoking his excellent cigar. Slowly he rubbed his hands, smoothing the sleeve of his dinner jacket which two common robberies had paid for. Then he felt in his back pocket for his gun, making a pretense of extracting his handkerchief.

Coffee finished, the trio adjourned to the library. Clain held the door for his wife and guest, then stepped inside the softly carpeted room and closed the door.

For Garth the moment had arrived. He allowed his glance to rove for a moment toward Mrs. Clain's throat around which hung by a slender gold chain the famous Clain ruby. The gem was as large as a pigeon egg, shaped like a lozenge, softly reflecting the dancing lights of the blaze in the great fireplace.

As Mrs. Clain seated herself, her husband turned on the radio. Then as the velvety notes of a symphony orchestra came pouring into the room, he turned to behold "Julian Worth" standing by the fireplace, a gun in his hand.

"Get away from the radio, Mr. Clain." Garth's voice had lost its geniality. Now it was edged with sharp steel. He waved the gun toward Clain's wife who had started up in horror. "Join your wife on the sofa. Sit down, both of you."

He adjusted the weapon in his hand, throwing a cartridge into the firing chamber. The sharp click of the catch snapping open was drowned by the radio. Then he sat down in a chair opposite the Clains. It took him five minutes to tell his story. When he had finished, he smiled and resumed his feet, glancing at the clock.

"As you can probably appreciate, I must waste no time. And I want to bring this comedy to its close as soon as possible." He paused, musing. "Twenty years, Clain, for me. Twenty minutes for you." He shot a glance toward the window, beyond which stretched the immense grounds of the estate.

"You have the keys of the tomb?" he asked softly.

Barton Clain's eyes narrowed in bewilderment. "They are in the desk."

"Get them." Garth stood aside as the young executive went to his desk and extracted a ring of keys from an upper drawer. "Naturally," he continued, "I must take no chances of your giving any alarm. What better place to silence you than in your father's tomb? Quaint of him to have had it built on the grounds. Homelike and cozy. But that was what he always wanted—even in death."

He chuckled. "And don't think your father's provision against his fear of being buried alive will avail you anything. Remember that I was here when the tomb was built. I know every inch of it, every switch that leads to this house." Rapidly he crossed the room to the door.

"As far as the servants are concerned we are taking a walk in the garden." He pushed open the portal with his free hand. "After you, Mr. Clain, Mrs. Clain."

They met no one as they crossed the

hall, opened the front door of the house, and emerged into the grounds. It was a matter of minutes to trek across the wet lawns.

Before them, a couple of hundred yards away, set on a little hillock, the tomb of Ellery Clain shone white and misty against the deep black of the night sky. There was no moon.

Garth, keeping his gun pointed at the plodding silent couple, chuckled. His plan was going perfectly. There had been risks, of course, but reasonable risks. What had he to lose? Daring everything, he had won.

Abruptly his thoughts centered on the great ruby. He had not expected this. But now profit could be added to revenge. The gem was easily worth a hundred thousand. Properly cut by the proper people it would lose some value, but on the proceeds he would be safe for life. Say in Mexico. For an instant a surge of exaltation swept over him. Then, stumbling in the damp grass, he recovered himself.

The tomb was hidden slightly by a grove of cypress planted around it in a wide circle. They approached it directly, Clain leading the way. There were no sounds audible except the chirp of crickets, the soft plodding of feet, and the infrequent noise of a motor car passing on the state road fifteen hundred yards away.

THE young executive needed no urging. He recognized the hopelessness of his position. Reaching the great metal door of his father's tomb, he swiftly unlocked it. Garth, motioning Clain and his wife into the yawning aperture, reached a hand inside the portal, searching for a switch. Abruptly lights flared. The metal door clanged shut behind them.

Garth lost no time. Herding the terrified couple to the center of the great vault, he hurriedly ripped away the signal switches set by the unlocked wooden casket resting on a large rectangular-shaped block of stone. Still covering husband and wife carefully

with his gun, he approached Mrs. Clain.

"The ruby," he said simply, offering his opened palm.

She said nothing, removing the jewel and giving it to him. Garth stuffed it into his pocket, backed rapidly toward the door of the tomb.

Clain took his wife in his arms.

"What are you going to do with us?" he demanded.

Garth laid a hand on the intricately carved handle of the tomb's door.

"What is more important is what I am going to do with myself. First I shall return to the Hotel Clayton in Manhattan, then arrange to dispose of the ruby. When that has been accomplished—Mexico. It's a poor reward for the twenty years of hell I've suffered through you, Clain, but I'm taking it nevertheless."

"What are you going to do with us?" Clain's voice was dull, flat. His arms tightened about his wife.

Garth raised his pistol and fired at Mrs. Clain. The shot struck her in the head. She died instantly. Clain bent under the weight of her body, then collapsed as another shot rang through the vault.

Garth emptied the gun. He fired until the pin clicked on an empty chamber, then flung the weapon. It skipped down the stairs, bouncing metallically, to come to rest in a slowly widening pool of blood. Then the heavy metal door shut behind him.

As Garth emerged into the cool night, sirens began blowing in the nearby towns. He shrugged indifferently. A blackout. Probably full dress, with hovering planes, searchlights, and blank flak shots from surrounding points. As he moved toward the house and his parked car, he saw the lights in the Clain mansion go out one by one as the servants, hearing the wailing sirens, acted to obey the orders.

Garth's car was not far away. He broke into a run, crossing the vast expanse of the lawn in great loping strides. As he reached the car, parked outside the Clain mansion, he swept

the horizon with a single glance. The blackout had successfully begun. Everything was in pitch darkness.

Then, as he got into the car and started the motor, he heard the hum of approaching aircraft high above. Garth paid no attention. The planes were nothing to him, while the blackout itself was but an added factor in his escape.

Swinging the black sedan into the driveway, he roared off down the road. From surrounding points in the countryside great fingers of light reached skyward like a crowd of rays.

His eyes fixed on the south road leading into New York, Garth drove onward, lights out, disregarding possible dangers on the road, staking everything on the chance of reaching Yonkers and the train terminal. There he planned to abandon the car and ride the New York Central into Manhattan.

Eighty minutes later, he stepped from a taxi in front of the Hotel Clayton, paid the man off, and mounted the steps to the brightly lit entrance. The blackout was over. Manhattan had come back to life. The streetlights were on, showing mistily through a beginning rain.

Garth, his hand clutching the Clain ruby, stepped across the threshold of the hotel, nodding to the doormen as he passed. A great joy surged through him. His escape had been ridiculously easy. And he left no trail. In a city of seven million he was as lost as a grain of sand on a beach.

"Stick 'em up, Garth!" snarled a harsh voice behind him. Then as the murderer whirled, a blue uniformed arm snapped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists. He was trapped. In another

minute searching hands had found the ruby.

Garth looked at the circle of police and detectives. His eyes were wild, puzzled, shot with fear.

"How," he began, gasping. "How did—"

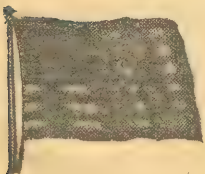
"You're under arrest, Garth." A police sergeant swung him around, "Not only for breaking jail, but also for the murders of Barton Clain and his wife." The sergeant paused, while through the murderer's mind ran a chaos of insane doubts.

"You must have forgotten that Ellery Clain's tomb had a glass roof because the old guy was afraid of the dark, even in death. Barton Clain was once a Boy Scout. He knew Morse code. You left him to die, but before he died he signaled the overhead planes in the practice blackout, flashing the tomb lights on and off. They found him dead behind the locked door."

Garth struggled desperately in the grip of the two burly cops. The dead could not speak! But the sergeant's voice went on, inexorably, like a toll of doom:

"In the blackness those lights could be seen clearly through the great glass roof from the planes. Clain told them you were heading for the Clayton in just five words: 'Garth—Hotel Clayton—stolen ruby.' He repeated the message three times. Then the aircraft transmitted the message by radio to the Army Command who retransmitted it to us."

Jasper Garth ceased his desperate struggles. He looked up at the bright lights of the city streets as he was led away. He was entering his own blackout. A blackout that would last forever.



Help Back Victory Attack!
BUY MORE WAR BONDS!

Breath of Suspicion

By L. W. Carmichael



Sergeant Staggart came home to the quiet New England town for a furlough from danger. But when screaming sirens woke the village to a holocaust of bloody murder, it was Staggart alone who dared not explain his midnight mission at the homicide site.

I WAS on my way home after telling Enid Waring good-night. It had taken three very pleasant hours to do this, and the telling hadn't been hindered any by the big silver plate of a moon that had been out while I was doing it.

I was feeling pretty good, because I'd finally convinced Enid that I was no longer the limb of Satan I'd been in our high school days. I'd also gone

a long way towards convincing her I had more on the ball than Dwight Leverett, the young physician who'd come to our village sometime during the five years I'd been away.

But don't get me wrong about this Leverett. I'd liked what little I'd seen of him. Indeed we had something in common—the habit of rubbing the rest of the village the wrong way and getting ourselves cordially disliked. By everyone except Enid, I mean.

I started to climb the steps of my Aunt Emma's house, grinning a little in anticipation of the bawling out I'd get for coming home so late. To Aunt Emma I was still merely Jim Stag-gart, a wayward nephew, rather than a war-toughened Army sergeant.

And then the fire siren on the far side of the village began to give with its banshee wail. So I started to run in the direction of the firehouse, which is something all able-bodied men are supposed to do in our small community.

I found a group of sleepy eyed men assembling in the floodlit square in front of the firehouse. They were cussing some and Brody, the fire chief, was cussing plenty.

"False alarm," he shouted. "One o'clock in the morning and someone had to set the siren going!"

Sheriff Bronson came puffing up, stuffing his shirt in between his pants and his potbelly as he ran. He snarled, "If I catch the guy who done it I'll slap him in the cooler."

His eyes narrowed when he saw me standing there. "Say," he said, "last time we had a false alarm, you was the one turned it in."

I nodded. "Sure, but that was five years back. I've been places and learned some since then."

Little Joe Gifford, the postmaster, pushed forward. In a thin mild voice he said, "Bronson, I think maybe it might have been the same guy busted into my post office."

Bronson stared at him. "Huh? When'd that happen?"

"Somewheres between when I left

home and when I got back," said Gifford. "Between ten and twelve-forty-five that would be. And here's a funny thing: I'd never have left home at all if someone that sounded like my brother hadn't called me up from Springfield. He told me he had to see me right away on a family matter that wouldn't keep till tomorrow. So I went there. And my brother hadn't rung me up at all."

"Why'd anyone play a trick like that?" asked Bronson.

Gifford shrugged his thin shoulders. "To get me out of the way while they swiped that package, I suppose."

"Swiped what package?"

"The one that was missing from the parcel post sack. Just as soon's I got back I saw where one of the sacks had been tied up different to what I'd tied it earlier on. I always get my sacks fixed up overnight so's the mail truck can pick 'em up first thing in the morning, see. Anyways I checked up and found there was only eight packages where there should have been nine."

Bronson scratched his bald head. "Why'd someone want to take only one parcel and leave the rest—?"

He paused, stared down the road. A voice that was tinged with hysteria was helloing us. We saw John Lynedoch come into view. We knew it was Lynedoch by his loose, long-limbed frame and his drunken gait. Lynedoch owned a local reservoir that furnished water to a half dozen of the surrounding townships. Apart from peddling the stuff he had little if any interest in water.

As he came closer we saw that his mouth was sagging and his eyes were bulging. He said, "Murder! Old Jeff Cobb! Strangled!"

"You're drunk!" snapped the sheriff.

Lynedoch came to a stop, stood swaying on his thin legs like a cornstalk in the breeze. He said, "Sure—sure—but not too drunk to—to recognize a corpse when I—see one. I was—was coming from the—reservoir

down to the firehouse and—I cut round the side of the post office and I stumbled over—over old Jeff. He's dead, I tell you—stone dead!"

We left him standing there and headed for the post office.

And what he'd said turned out to be the truth.

WE FOUND Jeff Cobb sprawled on the grass beneath one of the post office's side windows. I went down on my knees and examined him by the wavering beam of the flashlight that Bronson held.

I announced, "He's been dead an hour or more."

The postmaster started to weep. "He—he was my best friend," he sobbed. "I saw him alive not ten minutes before I left for Springfield."

"Did he know you were going to Springfield?" I asked.

Gifford nodded.

Sheriff Bronson said shakily, "We'd better get Doc Leverett to look him over. Come to think of it, it's queer the doc ain't here. Usually he's the first one out when the fire alarm goes. Give the doc a ring, Gifford."

Gifford stumbled indoors. Marsden, the grim-faced dairyman, knelt beside me, felt for the old man's heart-beat and growled, "It'd take a sight better doctor than that darn fool Leverett to bring this guy round. Hell! Who'd want to kill a nice guy like old Jeff?"

I suggested, "My guess is it was the feller who robbed the post office. Jeff was Gifford's nearest neighbor. He could have seen a light or something here and, knowing Gifford was out of town, come over to investigate. Maybe he stopped the killer as he was leaving."

"Could be," agreed Bronson. He turned to Gifford who had just rejoined us, "Doc coming?"

"His phone isn't working," said Gifford.

"Look," I said, "I'll go fetch him."

I crossed the street at a jog-trot, ducked around the back of the fire-

house and crossed the cow pasture that lay beyond. It saved a hundred yards or more that way instead of by the road. I passed through a gateway and ran on down the pathway of the doctor's back garden.

It was dark on that pathway because the tall elms shut out the light of the moon. That was why I didn't see the thing that jutted up an inch or so from the ground; that was why my foot hooked it and I fell flat.

Then as I lay there, dazed and wind-ed, I heard something that curdled my insides—a weird, hollow, groaning kind of sound that seemed to come right from underneath me. From inside the earth itself!

I sat up, shook the fog out of my brain, struck a match and looked around me. What I saw sent my mind groping back through the years. I recognized the thing I'd fallen over as the wooden cover of the old well that stood in the center of the pathway. The well had dried up twenty years back and Doc Leverett's predecessor had put a lid on it and built a path around it.

Yes, I remembered the old well all right. I remembered the time I'd been the ringleader of a gang of kids who'd —But let's forget that episode for the time being. It'll crop up later anyway.

The match burned out. I struck another and saw unmistakable evidence of a crowbar having been used to pry the well cover loose from the circular rim in which it was set. The cover wasn't flush with the ground as it should have been. That was why I'd tripped over it.

Again I heard that peculiar moaning sound. And now I had no doubt whatever that it came from inside the well shaft. I tore at the wooden cover, but it was thick and solid; I couldn't budge it. Then I went inside the doc's garage in search of something I could use as a jimmy. I came out with the handle of a tire jack. I also borrowed a flashlight I found lying on the doc's work bench.

The jack handle worked swell. I

rolled the heavy cover aside, knelt down at the black mouth of the well, and beamed the light down it.

I caught my breath. The groans had come from the broken, crumpled man who lay at the bottom of the shaft fifty feet down.

The groans had come from young Doctor Leverett!

But he groaned no more. He looked terribly dead.

A DISTANT voice sounded from the direction of the firehouse. Marsden, the dairyman, was shouting my name and asking what about the doctor. I went to the end of the garden and hollered back:

"The doc fell down his well. I think he's dead. Fetch a ladder from the house. And fetch Bronson."

Then I sat down on one of the garden chairs. Things had been happening so fast I'd gone suddenly limp.

I thought over the succession of unusual events that had hit our quiet little village during the past few hours: The trick that had lured Gifford out of town, the burglary, the murder of old Jeff, the false alarm, and now this thing that had happened to Leverett.

I decided that it couldn't be just coincidence that had caused these things to happen one right after the other. Some or all of the parts tied up somewhere—with the body down the well as the hub around which all the other parts revolved.

That posed the question of who would want to get the doc out of the way. The answer was that there were a dozen people would like him out of the way. But whether they'd go as far as murder was another matter entirely.

As I understood it he'd no sooner hung up his shingle than he'd started trying to make over the village sanitary arrangements and stuff like that. Moreover he'd proposed changes that would have cost the village plenty. We're thrifty folks in our corner of New England and we don't like hav-

ing our purses tapped. Not by outsiders anyway.

Voices sounded. Feet rustled in the long grass. A light flashed. Men filed through the gate, bringing a ladder with them. Bronson was at their head.

He said, "Look, if this is another fool trick—"

I snapped, "Take a peek down the well."

Bronson did what he was told. He recoiled. Some of the other men took his flashlight from him and also took a peek. Judging by their exclamation of horror I imagine that most of them felt kind of sick at the stomach.

Marsden said, "Who's going down to fetch him up?"

Lynedoch laughed drunkenly, teetered precariously near to the edge of the well, and pointed at Bronson, who very obviously was trying his best not to throw up.

Bronson is," said Lynedoch. "Bronson's a big brave cop. Bronson isn't scared of busted corpses."

Bronson shook his head, mopped his brow. "No, I'm leaving him there till the medical examiner's looked him over."

"Hell!" I exploded. "Someone's got to see whether there's any life left in him."

"Okay, you go take a look," said Bronson.

He motioned for the ladder to be slid down the well and, because what I'd seen in Africa and Italy had kind of toughened me against such things as corpses, I went down to examine the remains.

I found that the doctor was dead. That didn't surprise me. What did surprise me was that he had survived the fall long enough to utter those moans, because the way the shattered bones grated beneath my exploring fingers suggested there wasn't a whole bone left in his body.

I saw something else beside the body while I was down there. I saw that the bottom of the well was littered with broken pieces of wood. Some of these pieces of wood were

curved at the edge, as though they had once been part of a large and flimsy wheel. That was interesting and cleared up several points that had puzzled me.

I climbed back up the ladder. Candidly I felt more nauseated than I'd expected to feel.

"Bronson," I said, "the doc was murdered. The killer took off the well cover and substituted a weaker cover in its place. He meant the second cover to collapse when the doctor ran across it. And to make sure he *did* run across it the killer set off the alarm down at the firehouse. The doc, I understand, was crazy about going to fires, so it was certain sure he'd come running down this path and step into the trap that had been set for him."

Bronson looked kind of helpless. "But—but who'd want to kill the doc?"

I said, "There's quite a few folks in this village who'd profit by having the doctor out of the way. For instance, I hear he's threatened to put Marsden out of business unless he installs more sanitary barns and equipment on his dairy farm. The same goes for Moore and his pigs and Dryden and his poultry. Then, too, he wanted the village to dig into its pockets for the dough that'd buy new plumbing for the schoolhouse and for a new sewerage system."

"See here, Staggart," shouted Marsden, "you better be careful what you say. Maybe you're right about us hating the doc, but what we had against him didn't call for us to kill him!"

Lynedoch lurched forward. "No," he said, "those things didn't call for a killing—but maybe getting rid of the guy your girl was sweet on did!"

I FELT hot anger rush to my cheeks. I realized then that in antagonizing these men I'd put myself in an awkward spot. I also realized that I'd been a fool to suspect that the villagers didn't know about how things stood with me and Enid. Hell, the very

walls have ears and eyes in a village like ours.

Bronson said, "By cripes! Look, Staggart, how come you was the only one down to the firehouse who was fully dressed? Yeah, dressed to the last button of your uniform!"

I laughed. "That's easy. I didn't happen to be in bed when the alarm went off."

"No? Then where was you?"

An ice cold spider wiggled up my spine. I could feel the wave of suspicion that ran through the men surrounding me. The air was vibrant with it. To make things worse I couldn't tell the simple and innocent truth—that I'd been sitting on a rail fence with Enid Waring between the hours of ten and one. No, if I told them that, they'd immediately suspect the worst.

In our village respectable girls are indoors by ten-thirty, particularly if the girl is the minister's daughter, which is what Enid is. Sure. That's how narrow we are.

"Where was you?" repeated Bronson.

"I was—I was out in the fields, that's where."

The lameness of my alibi brought a general chorus of unbelief.

Lynedoch came forward and thrust his unshaven face within a few inches of mine. He said, "Kid, monkeying with that well is old stuff with you. I mind the time you lifted the lid off that well once before. You and your gang. And you put Ma Malone's billy-goat down it and the goat nigh baaed its head off before we could get it up again."

I exclaimed, "For Pete's sake, what's a childish prank got to do with what happened tonight?"

"Everything," said Lynedoch, chuckling with drunken glee. "Yeah, everything. If you'd read more you'd know more. A guy name of Shakespeare once said the child was father to the man, and he was darn tooting right."

"By cripes!" shouted Bronson, "you got something there, Lynedoch!"

"Maybe," I said sarcastically, "you can pin the bogus phone call and those other things on me too?"

"Maybe we can at that," said Marsden. "Where was you round about nine to ten o'clock? That'd be about the time the call came through from Springfield."

"Ten minutes past nine was the time the call came through," said Gifford.

"Okay, where was you at that time?" persisted Marsden.

My heart skidded all the way down to my boots. At ten minutes past nine Enid and I were leaving a movie show over in Springfield!

I licked my dry lips, said, "I prefer not to say where I was."

A hostile growl arose from the men around me. Bronson said, "All this adds up to a pretty strong case against you. Staggart, you're under arrest. Bring him along to the town hall, boys."

Strong hands grabbed me and we started for the town hall, where the village's one and only jail cell was located. I went without protest, trying to get my whirling brain to function smoothly.

I was in serious trouble. These muleheaded, prejudiced men had already tried me and found me guilty. Apart from dragging Enid into the case there seemed to be no way I could clear myself.

But wait—!

Maybe there was a way out at that!

I'd just recalled something. Something that might serve as a clue to the real killer. The only trouble with this clue was that it wasn't something tangible that you could see or touch or smell. Least of all smell.

What to do about it? Tell Bronson? Definitely no. Bronson's one track mind wouldn't be able to grasp its significance. That left it squarely up to myself.

We reached the steps of the town hall. Bronson went ahead, opened the door, flicked the wall switch that flooded the foyer with light. Beyond

the foyer the auditorium loomed cavernous and black.

I started to stagger as they pushed me up the steps. As we entered the foyer I made like my knees were buckling under me. I gasped, "F-feel f-faint." Automatically the men who held me allowed me to lurch towards the wall—the wall where the light switch was.

I jerked up my elbow.

The lights went out.

THE surprise element worked, I wrenched myself free. My fists lashed out right and left, encountered solid bone and yielding, protesting flesh. I heard the thud of bodies hitting the stone floor, heard the sheriff shrieking:

"My flashlight—you're treading on it—"

Then I was in the auditorium. I remembered every inch of the place from boyhood. I bounded onto the back of one of the wooden pews, balanced myself for a second, leaped upwards. My fingers closed on the balcony rail.

I swung my legs up, slid over the rail, groped my way through the chairs which were arranged in rows up there, picked one of them up and sent it crashing through the moonlit window which I could see relieving the intense darkness over in the corner. The window went out, frame and all, with an impact that sounded like a bomb explosion.

Lights, white, blinding, came on. Voices shouted, "The balcony!" Feet thudded upstairs. I dived under the chairs, lay there palpitating.

My pursuers fell for the bait, completely, stupidly.

The sheriff announced, "He left by that window. He must have crossed the porch roof and dropped down onto the lawn. Out after him, boys. Scatter around. He mustn't get clear."

The more enterprising among them went out through the window. The remainder flooded downstairs and out into the street. None had the gumption to suspect a trick.

However, the odds were that someone brighter than the rest would get to putting two and two together when they didn't find me outside. Therefore it behooved me to locate some more satisfactory hiding place.

And anyway, even at the risk of being caught, I had to see a man about two murders.

I crawled from beneath the seat, started a cautious descent of the stairway that led down to the foyer. The stairway turned twice before it reached the bottom. I took the turn with my fists clubbed in readiness for instant action. The stairs seemed to creak like pistol shots with every step I took.

I heard voices talking in subdued tones. One of the voices might have belonged to any one of the local men. I didn't catch what it said. The other voice was thin, metallic, and undoubtedly belonged to Postmaster Gifford. I stopped, flattened myself against the wall, strained my ears to catch the words.

Gifford said, "Well, I'll tell you why I held you back. It's because you've got some tall explaining to do. It's this way: I got to trying to remember who it was mailed parcels yesterday. By and by, I decided that the missing parcel had been mailed by Doc Leverett. It had a covering letter addressed to the State Commissioner of Public Health and it was tagged *Glass With Care* and—"

That was as far as the speaker went. There was a choking gasp, as though a hand had closed on his throat. I stood there undecided as to whether or not I should interfere at this point.

Then there was a horrible crunching thud. Something that could be only a human body crashed to the floor. Metal clanked on stone. The front door banged. Footsteps clattered down the steps outside.

I raced down into the foyer, skidded on something wet—significantly wet. I struck a match, felt my hair pringle at the sight of the mess of

blood and brains that oozed from the postmaster's head. The blood and the brains had spattered in all directions. Lying near the body was the death weapon—the heavy nozzle of a fire hose. This the killer had snatched from its hook on the wall.

I opened the front door and took a welcome breath of fresh air, peered out into the moonlit night as I tried to locate the men who were searching for me. I could hear their voices as they probed the shadows of the neighboring houses and barns. A familiar figure, round, lumbering, was picked out by the light that blazed from Marsden's dairy.

The sheriff! Headed in my direction, a long-barreled shotgun held at his hip!

ANXIETY'S cold finger touched my heart. Bronson wasn't so dumb at that. He'd evidently decided that the town hall would be a good place to search.

Hell! I thought, getting trapped here along with the third corpse will put the finishing touch on the case they've got against me. And it'll stop me seeing that man about the murders!

I slipped back inside the door, quietly closed it, crouched behind it. My heart was rapping on my ribs like the mallets on a xylophone. I heard the sheriff's footsteps approach, heard them shuffle up the steps. The door was opened. A flashlight stabbed the gloom.

Bronson gasped in incredulous horror as he saw the thing on the floor.

I hit him squarely on the button and he went head over heels through the partly open door and down the steps. By the time the stars had quit shooting before his eyes, I was squinting down at him along the barrel of his own rifle.

I said, "Thanks for the cannon. Now, get up and do everything I say to do or there'll be a fourth killing. There'll be a killing anyway if any-

one attempts to interfere with us. You're a hostage, see?"

The bruised Bronson got slowly to his feet. The gun muzzle prodded him in the ribs and set his unwilling feet in motion. With the ever present gun to steer him he stumbled across the road, around the corner of an old farm building and started up the hill that lay beyond.

As we walked I told him, "You may not believe it but you're on your way to arrest a man for murder—only the man isn't me."

"Lookit," protested Bronson, "there ain't anything up here, but—"

"Button your lips and keep climbing," I rasped. "Just do all I say and you'll find the answers at the top—I hope. And remember, not a word out of you or you'll get your heart blasted out."

We trudged silently on until we came upon the silver level of the village reservoir. We followed a narrow path along the bank of the reservoir until the building that served as a combination house and pumping station came into view. I felt nervous. If I'd guessed wrong about this thing I'd be in worse trouble than ever.

But I'd guessed right. We suddenly saw something that stopped us dead in our tracks.

Kneeling beside the water was a long, gaunt man. He was naked. On the ground before him was a large stone, around which he was wrapping sundry items of clothing. We saw the legs of a pair of pants being used to tie up the bundle.

The man arose, the bundle in his hands.

I snapped, "Raise 'em!"

The man spun around, his mouth agape. He snarled, wound up like a baseball pitcher, sent the bundle hurtling through the air. It missed my head by inches. A split second later a bullet creased the man's head and he fell sprawling.

"It—it's Lynedoch," breathed Bronson. "What—what's this all about, Staggart?"

"Help me get him into the house and I'll tell you," I said.

We carried the wounded man into the house and laid him on a bed.

I examined the wound, announced, "He'll have a headache from now until the time he goes to the chair."

Then I went outside and collected the bundled clothes, brought them into the house, tossed them onto the floor.

"There's blood and—stuff on them," said Bronson.

"Gifford's blood and Gifford's brains," I said grimly.

I unwrapped the bundle and came across a small parcel which had been thrust into one of the pants pockets. The parcel contained a bottle of water. A covering letter went with it.

It was addressed to the State Commissioner of Public Health, and it drew the commissioner's attention to the polluted condition of the water that was being supplied sundry New England townships by the Lynedoch Water Supply Company. A sample was enclosed for laboratory testing.

"That test would have put Lynedoch out of business," I explained. "That was why he lured Gifford out of town, climbed into the post office and swiped the parcel. Probably the doc had told him he'd just mailed it. He also killed old Jeff, who had the misfortune to butt in at the wrong time.

"But merely grabbing the parcel wouldn't have helped any if the doc had stayed alive. So he fixed the booby trap for the doc, then started the fire siren going so's the doc would fall to his death. Unfortunately for his plans Lynedoch was too cocksure of himself. He replaced the well cover an inch out of place—and I fell over it and heard the doc's dying groans. That inch will mean the difference between life and death to Lynedoch."

There was a respectful kind of awe in Bronson's voice as he stared open-mouthed at me and said, "Why did you suspect Lynedoch and what made you come up here after him?"

TSD

I said, "I'll answer the second part first. The foyer of the town hall was a mess of splattered blood and brains. Splashed right up the wall, it was. That meant there'd be plenty on the killer and that he'd be heading for home to clean himself off and maybe destroy his clothing."

Bronson nodded slowly. "And now tell me why you suspected Lynedoch in the first place."

I explained, "My nose tipped me off. Remember when Lynedoch pushed his face into mine back there in the doctor's garden? Well, that was another mistake of his. He was supposed to be drunk, but for once in his life he was cold sober. He needed to be sober to do all he planned to do. So when I

found there was no booze on his breath, I knew he was up to some damn deep game. That's why I made that break. I planned to look further into Lynedoch's affairs, beat the truth out of him if necessary. When he murdered Gifford it kind of simplified things."

Bronson stared at me. The guy looked embarrassed. He was trying to think of something complimentary to say, and it didn't come natural to him.

Finally he burst out with, "I guess we was maybe mistaken about you. And—and I hope the minister's daughter marries you."

And, d'you know, Bronson isn't going to be disappointed.



Why Man's Prayers Did Not Stop Hitler

Millions of people daily practice meditation, prayer, new thought and other spiritual exercises. For many years people of good will have been praying for the overthrow of Hitler, Hirohito and what they stand for. Why has the answer been so long delayed? Why do so many other prayers remain unanswered? Why does calamity often befall us in spite of our prayers?

Thirty years ago, in Forbidden Tibet, behind the highest mountains in the world, a young Englishman named Edwin J. Dingle found the answers to these questions. A great mystic opened his eyes. A great change came over him. He realized the strange Power that Knowledge gives.

That Power, he says, can transform the life of anyone. Questions, whatever they are, can be answered. The problems of health, death, poverty and wrong can be solved.

In his own case, he was brought back to splendid health. He acquired wealth, too, as well as worldwide professional recognition. Thirty years ago he was sick as a man could be and live. Once his coffin was bought. Years of almost continuous tropical fevers, broken bones, near blindness, privation and danger had made a human wreck of him, physically and mentally.

He was about to be sent back to England to die when a strange message came— "They are wait-

ing for you in Tibet." He wants to tell the whole world what he learned there, under the guidance of the greatest mystic he ever encountered during his 21 years in the Far East. He wants everyone to experience the greater health and the Power which there came to him.

Within 10 years he was able to retire to this country with a fortune. He had been honored by fellowships in the World's leading geographical societies for his work as a geographer. And today, 30 years later, he is still so athletic, capable of so much work, so young in appearance, it is hard to believe he has lived so long.

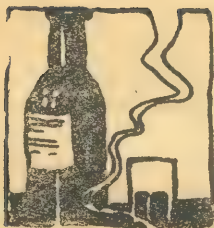
As a first step in their progress toward the Power that Knowledge gives, Mr. Dingle wants to send to readers of this notice a 9,000-word treatise. It is free. For your free copy, send your name and address to the Institute of Mental-physics, 213 South Hobart Blvd., Dept. H-182, Los Angeles 4, Calif. Write promptly.



Cold hate powered George Collins' murder scheme, but he had forgotten to harness . . .

Fury's Backfire

By William Hellmann



JUDGE BLAKE looked up from the papers on his desk to see the tall, thick young man step in out of the night through the open French window, deliberately turn, lock the window and draw tight the drapes.

"Proper entrance," the judge said acidly, "for a thief."

"Uncle Charles! What a way to greet your favorite nephew!" He made a gesture of mock hurt, grinned. His face was round, pale, and slightly puffed, his nose long and narrow, a discord in that face, like a carrot stuck upright in a cornstarch pudding.

"Don't 'uncle' me!" the judge snapped. "And I forbade you to ever enter my house again."

"Same old uncle," George Collins sighed. "And the same old room, staid, solid—and valuable. Same swell rug on the floor." He swept his foot back and forth across it, watching the pattern it made.

"Remember how we kids used to shuffle our feet across it to 'make 'tricity,' then stick out a finger to see the spark jump. Remember how I always loved to shoot at the back of your neck to see you jump, and how furious you got?" He laughed heartily. "Poor uncle, I always was a trial, wasn't I?"

"If it is money again," the judge said heavily, "the answer is no. Not one cent will I give you."

"This time, dear uncle, I'm not ask-

ing, I'm taking. Not a paltry thousand or two, but millions—nice fat millions. You see, dear uncle, I have come to kill you."

"You are a crazy fool," Judge Blake said disgustedly. "Do you think I would be so insane as to let you have a cent of my money?"

Collins smiled. "Of course you know my sweet mother died last week."

"Certainly, you fool. I buried her while you were away swilling with your worthless friends."

"I dare say Mother's as securely buried as if I had been there. I'm no hypocrite, so I won't pretend I shall miss her. But I would miss the money her loving brother sent her, meagre as it was. How I waited for you to die, so I could get those lovely dollars of yours; but you're a tough old skate and sweet Mother died first."

He watched his foot scuffing a broad arc in the soft pile of the rug, looked up sideways archly. "I am her only heir—and she is yours, dear uncle. Get it?"

Judge Blake started despite himself. "You are," he said calmly, "a double-barreled fool. I changed my will today."

COLLINS laughed outright, his sharp nose twinkling. "Oh, no, you did not! I know, dear uncle, believe me. I made sure of that. Just as I know you are unarmed and alone in this big old house, and will be until midnight, long after my job is finished."

"You will never get away with it;

they will get you surely. Then what good will the money be?"

"Not me, they won't. I planned this well. No messy bungled job for me. I've made sure of every detail. No sign of violence, of little Georgie's mastermind and hand."

He took a small can, like a miniature beer can, from his pocket, held it up for the judge's inspection.

"This is it. Ether. Powerful stuff, I assure you. But quick, clean and easy. I pour a little on this nice white cloth, hold it to your face—carefully, so it won't burn or spill—and you go quietly to sleep. More—and the old pumper quits, and you are gone. The night is hot, dry, so the stuff will evaporate quickly, and there'll be no tell-tale smell.

"To help, I'll spill some of that whisky you so conveniently keep handy here on your desk. Later, Annie comes in to see why you are still up, finds you sitting there, serene and peaceful, the soft breeze blowing through the open window. And the good old coroner will say 'heart' and not mention the liquor for the family's sake."

He smiled. "Lots of heart cases, these hectic days, dear uncle."

The judge stared at him, eyes betraying his horror. "You devil! Mary died of—" He shook his head unbelievably. "But Dr. Clyde said she did die of a bad heart."

"Of course she did, dear uncle," Collins laughed. "I wasn't even there. But now, let's—don't try it!" he warned harshly as the old man's eye measured his chances with the heavy paperweight.

"I'm going to kill you, sure, if I have to shoot you or bash in your head. Any way I'm safe, regardless, for there's no one near, no one knows I am in town, and a dozen friends will swear I was nowhere near. But I prefer taking no chances at all, prefer that no hint of suspicion be raised. But die you shall—and I'm giving you a quick easy way out."

"Don't be a fool, George," Judge Blake said desperately. He was old and tired, he was no coward, but he did not want to die, not like that. "You will get caught. I'll give you money, enough to—"

"No, dear uncle, you must die. But don't fret so. You've lived long enough and you're going out easily and quickly. This stuff is powerful medicine."

He picked up the can from the desk with his gloved hand, unscrewed the top. A sweet sickish smell slowly pervaded the room. "Jumpy, it is—volatile is the word. A few whiffs under your big beak and—"

He passed the open can beneath his nose in a light gesture. There was a small snap, like the crack of a tiny whip, and instantly a blast of blue flame caught him full in the face, searing his eyeballs in their sockets.

The second explosion filled the room with fire, shattered the windows, and rolled the judge across the floor like a straw in the wind. In blind panic, he opened the French window, and the flames shot over him as he fell out onto the porch. He got up then and ran screaming across the lawn.

"But how did it happen?" the judge asked, bewildered. "He was going to kill me, then the can suddenly exploded. A miracle?"

"Natural enough," the Chief said dryly. "Four people were killed in a Philadelphia operating room in exactly the same manner. Static electricity and a highly explosive anesthetic. Collins planned well. And he knew the stuff would blow up. And he knew the rug generated static. But he didn't relate the two.

"The hot dry weather induced a heavy charge. Static loves a sharp point to take off from. His gloved hands discouraged it there; his long sharp nose was next best, so it jumped to the can—and there he is—a rather burned-up man, almost a cinder in fact."

"Holy smoke!" the judge said, awed, and no one added to it.

Crime Time

By David M. Norman



★ ★ ★

The condemned murderer could gloat as he walked to the chair. For he knew that when the state's executioner threw the hot seat switch, seventy miles away sudden death would add a new corpse to that slayer's record.

SERGEANT MATTY MARTIN stood in the dusty hallway of the big house and wrinkled his nose.

To the three men standing slightly aft of him, he said, "Well, the guy who owns this house is going into a murderer's grave in a few minutes, but if he lived here very long, I don't think he'll know the difference."

Attorney Carver gave a short

laugh. "The house wasn't always this way, Sergeant. When Ted Hanley resided here, it was full of life, but—he's been in jail for a full year waiting for tonight to come. The house has been closed up."

Carver was blond, of average height; he wore shell-rimmed glasses through which mild blue eyes seemed to stare in perpetual wonder. He was a fairly good lawyer too. Sergeant Martin knew that because Carver had put up a pretty good defense for his client.

Flanking Attorney Carver were two men of contrasting appearances and personalities. Lou Nadine, a cousin of the owner of this house was scrawny, nervous, and plainly frightened. Ray Brill, step-brother of the owner, was a big man in height and girth. Black eyes were shrouded by blacker and very bushy brows. He had fat lips and a generally unwholesome expression.

Ray Brill muttered a low curse. "We're crazy to come up just because this lawyer says so."

"But—Ted told Carver to bring us here," Nadine said. "We are to have a letter read to us. A letter from Ted. We will know what's in it only a few minutes before they strap him into the chair. It's about money and I need money."

"We'll all go into the living room," Attorney Carver suggested. "Ted Hanley talked to me this afternoon from his death cell. He gave me certain instructions which I am duty bound to carry out and he gave me this sealed letter. It is to be opened at ten minutes before eleven—just ten minutes before Ted will receive the shocks that will make him atone for the murder he committed."

THEY filed into the spacious living room. Sergeant Martin grunted, struck some matches and lit several candles. The electricity had been turned off months before. He watched Ray Brill drop into a chair directly opposite a grandfather's clock. Lou

Nadine sat quite close to him, while Attorney Carver was busy opening his brief case from which he took a long sealed envelope. Then Carver arranged two candles so he could see to read.

"The old clock is still here," Lou Nadine said nervously.

Ray Brill snorted in contempt. "So what? It's just an old clock. Maybe worth a few bucks as a relic. You don't believe the fairy tale about it, do you?"

Nadine licked his lips. In the flickering candle light he looked like an ugly little gnome.

"Yes. I believe in the story. It's all part of the Hanley family history. You're not a real member of the tribe, Ray. Not as close as me, for instance. That old clock strikes every time some member of the Hanley family dies violently."

Sergeant Martin overheard all this and frowned deeply. There was some reason why Ted Hanley had ordered his two heirs up here to this old house. Whatever the reason, it was bad. Ted Hanley had never done a decent thing in his life. He was one of the very few condemned men for whom Martin had no sympathy.

"Please," Attorney Carver rustled the envelope between his fingers. "Everyone quiet. It's time to open this letter. Sergeant, you will notice the flap is securely sealed. I do not know what the envelope contains."

Sergeant Martin nodded vaguely. He was studying the tall, ancient grandfather's clock with the strange history. It occupied a place of honor in this big room. On either side of it were two slender, tall ornamental candlesticks with broad bases. Close by was a winding staircase to the upper floors. It had thick balustrades and very ornamental newel posts at the bottom. They were hand-carved into grotesque figures.

Attorney Carver unfolded the letter. He cleared his throat, adjusted the horn-rimmed glasses and turned slightly to the left so the light of the

candles would play better on the letter. Then he read it:

I shall be about to die when this letter is read. They'll be taking me into the death cell, but I can laugh at that. We Hanleys never die. Yet in this world of ghosts to which I shall be whisked by a bolt of man-made lightning, I have no need for the estate and the money a human requires.

Therefore I have caused my two heirs to be assembled, together with the unreasonable detective who arrested me. I think he will enjoy the show I shall put on. When any member of my family dies, the old clock will strike. Wait and see! As it does, someone else will die. I don't care who, but—if it is one of my two heirs, the one who remains will inherit my entire estate. I'll be there, somewhere in the shadows, laughing at your terror. In fact, I'll be in the house always.

Attorney Carver slowly put the letter onto a small table. "That's all it says." He had lost his professional aplomb and seemed to be as frightened as the others. Even Ray Brill, with his brutal face and figure, was ashen.

Sergeant Martin gave a short laugh. "This is all nonsense, but it isn't eleven yet. Let's see that letter, Hanley."

Martin read it, dropped it on the table again and strode over to the grandfather's clock. He opened the glass door, pushed the huge metal pendulum to one side and then went for a candle. He held this into the clock, bent and peered up at the hidden mechanism. He reached up and brought down a piece of rusty metal.

"If that clock strikes," he said, "then the ghost legend of the Hanley clan makes sense. Nothing but a ghost could make it strike and I think even a spectre would have some trouble. The springs are all shot, except for the one that controls the striking mechanism. The pendulum, however, has broken away from the spring and has no control over the chimes. In a word—the clock is busted—good."

Lou Nadine stirred restlessly. "Just the same I don't like it. In two minutes or so, they'll turn on the juice. Ted

will die. Sure he deserves it. He killed that man in cold blood and he was justly convicted, but if he comes back here as a ghost, he may kill us all. I'm scared."

Ray Brill's hamlike hands were clenched into tight fists. "I don't mind saying I am, too. Ted Hanley's mother was also my mother. She was never a part of the Hanley tribe except by marriage, but she knew all the stories about them. Some didn't sound too healthy."

ATTORNEY CARVER was watching his wrist watch intently. "It's half a minute of eleven," he said. "I don't see the clock starting to go yet. I don't think it will. I—"

There was a distinct tick, followed by another and another. Sergeant Martin gasped. The pendulum was moving. Yet no human hand had touched the clock except his and he had been very careful not to disturb the pendulum. He had been likewise careful to note that it was impossible that this clock could work. It did though. Each tick seemed louder than the last one.

Ray Brill leaned forward in his chair, his eyes bulging. Lou Nadine huddled deeper into his, as though he wanted to become part of the cushions. Attorney Carver stood gaping and the eyes behind his glasses were no longer mild. They were horror-filled.

Sergeant Martin reached for his gun, drew it, and backed up against the wall. He didn't want anyone hidden in this old house to pop out in back of him. The clock went on ticking, the only sound to be heard except for the heavy breathing of those present.

Then the gong sounded. The first stroke sent shivers of apprehension even into Martin's hard-boiled heart and senses. He knew his face was covered with a fine film of sweat even though it was cold in here. The house had the chill dampness of a tomb.

Nine—ten—eleven. The last note seemed louder than the others and as it struck, the pendulum swung half-

way back and came to a stop. A hoarse yell came out of the semi-gloom. Martin didn't move and his gun was held in a steady hand.

"Brill!" Attorney Carver shouted and moved forward. "Brill! Catch him, somebody. He's fainted."

Martin moved then. He was at the side of the burly man, pushing him back into the chair. Suddenly Martin let go, stepped away and looked down at his hand. It was smeared with fresh blood. He pushed Ray Brill's head back, pulled his coat away and saw the narrow haft of a dagger sticking out of his chest. It had hit almost directly above the heart. Ray Brill was dead.

"Nadine," Martin said crisply, "and you, Carver, stand where you are. Don't move an inch. Brill is dead—murdered—and that clock has something to do with what happened."

Martin went over to the clock, opened the glass door again, and seized the pendulum. It was very heavy. He looked inside the case, being much more careful this time. Three or four minutes later, he straightened up.

"All right," he said. "Relax as much as possible. We all heard the clock tick. We heard it strike. I'll say here and now that any clock expert would agree with me. The clock can't work and yet it did. Brill died, just as the letter said one of us would die. Ted Hanley is dead too, by this time. The electric chair does a quick job."

"Then he'll be here too," Nadine squealed. "He is here. He killed Brill. None of us was near him. How did he get stabbed? We didn't do it."

"I don't know," Martin said, "but a ghost didn't knife him. I don't believe in ghosts, not even when a family legend says they exist and this business happened to show us it is the truth. Nadine, you are now the heir. You inherit Ted Hanley's estate and that makes you Suspect Number One."

"Me?" Nadine squeaked. "But I didn't kill him. I couldn't kill a fly. I—I—I'm always too scared of things.

Please, let me go. If I stay here, I'll maybe die too."

"You stay," Martin said. "So do you, Carver, and me, until this is cleared up. Help me carry Brill over to that davenport. We can cover the body decently and then settle down to some investigating."

CARVER wasn't enthusiastic about the job, but he knew it had to be done. Martin pulled a somber looking drape from the wall and used it as a sheet. Then he returned and stood directly beside the clock.

"I agree that none of us three men could possibly have killed Brill. We were not close enough to him to wield a knife. Therefore we can't be alone in this house. There is a murderer present and I intend to get him."

"But—but, Sergeant," Attorney Carver said, "we were all close by. If someone slipped up on Brill, we would have seen him. He was stabbed from the front. I'll swear I saw no one."

"In this light," Martin waved a hand at the flickering candles, "anything could happen. We were all intent on watching the clock anyway. Personally, I think that letter was written with the obvious purpose of focussing all our attention on the clock so a killer could sneak up and use that knife. Nadine, you knew the family better than anyone. Have you any ideas?"

"Yes," Nadine was wide-eyed in terror, "but you'll laugh at them just like you laughed at the clock. Ted Hanley hated Brill. I always thought he'd kill him some day and he did. Go ahead, laugh. Ted died in the electric chair in the prison seventy miles from here, but I think he came back and knifed Brill. He came back as a—a ghost."

"Nonsense," Attorney Carver scoffed. "Things like that just don't happen. Whoever murdered Brill is human just like us."

Martin said, "Carver, getting down

to facts, tell me what Ted Hanley said when he gave you that note?"

Carver shrugged. "As you know, not a soul visited Hanley. People didn't like him. Brill and Nadine were his only relatives and they didn't care if he was executed. In fact, I'd say they were highly elated, because it meant his money would become theirs."

"That's a lie!" Nadine screamed. "You're trying to form a motive so you can say I killed him."

"Shut up," Martin snapped. "You can talk later. Go ahead, Carver."

"Ted Hanley sent for me. I visited him in the death house late this afternoon. When the guard's back was turned, Hanley slipped this letter to me. I took it despite prison rules. After all, it was just a letter from a man who was very close to death."

"And just what did Hanley say about it?" Martin queried.

"He told me to follow out his orders to the letter. Assemble Brill, Nadine, and you in the house. Sergeant, Hanley hated you above all men. If this is some kind of a trick, concocted before Hanley was executed, you may be next on the list. Perhaps that knife was even meant for you. Hanley always said if you hadn't been so clever and worked so hard on the case, he might have gotten away with it."

Martin shivered. Nothing could be more truthful. He could still hear Hanley as they led him away after sentencing. He'd shouted that Martin would pay. Now it seemed that Hanley was evening the score. He didn't have to kill him to make him suffer. A murder like this, accomplished under his eyes, under almost unbelievable conditions, was quite enough. If he made a true report, they'd laugh at him, question his sanity, and yet he couldn't lie about it. He had to solve this case and without much delay.

"If we could only explain that clock," he grunted. "Nadine, you're sure about the legend that goes with it?"

Nadine nodded and licked his lips.

"I ought to be sure. It was impressed on me often enough. The clock hasn't run in more than a hundred years except—when some member of the clan dies by violence. Most of them died violently. They were a hard living bunch, the Hanleys. Ted's father was murdered."

"Yes, I know," Martin frowned. "I found that out in checking Hanley's history. Carver, we'll dispense with professional ethics. This is murder and it calls for a ruthless investigation. Just how much did Ted Hanley leave in the form of an estate?"

"Enough," Carver said. "I'm not exactly sure of the figures. The house is worth a great deal. There are twenty-two rooms in it. Cash and bonds will total about fifty or sixty thousand."

Nadine let out a yell of surprise. "But I thought there was at least half a million."

Carver shrugged. "There may be. The estate is very valuable. Keep in mind, Nadine, that Hanley spent thousands on his defense, and before being locked up he wasn't exactly a miser. Ted Hanley enjoyed life to the hilt and didn't care how much it cost."

"Iron out those things later," Martin grunted. "Right now I think we ought to search this house in self protection."

"We—we'd better do it together," Nadine shivered.

Martin laughed curtly. "While we search one room, the killer would have the rest of the house to himself. No, we'll separate. Nadine, you can take this floor. Carver, you go upstairs. I'm going into the cellar. Arm yourself with pokers from the fireplace and, get this, the clock is not to be touched under any circumstances."

"I wouldn't go within ten feet of it," Nadine shuddered. "It's an evil thing."

Carver said, "And I don't blame you. If the clock strikes again, it means you're going to die. You're the last member of this crazy family, Nadine."

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Nadine almost went into a convulsion of terror. He drew both feet up onto the chair and pressed himself hard against the back of it. Martin knew there was nothing to be done for a man so afraid and the house had to be searched. He nodded at Carver and thanked his lucky stars that at least one of the two men here had nerve enough to carry on.

MARTIN, gun in one hand, candle in the other, went down the dusty cobwebbed blocked stairs to the cellar. He found a large work bench with all kinds of wood-carving tools there, but they offered no clue. The wine cellar was amply stocked. He'd have enjoyed a hefty drink of that Napoleon brandy, but he resisted temptation. He needed every ounce of

brain matter every second. Alcohol wouldn't increase the sharpness of his wits.

He prowled around the very spacious basement in a vain search for a clue. There was a thud on the floor over his head. He raced up the stairs. Nadine was in the hallway.

"I—I decided to at least try and act like a man," he said. "I'll search the first floor. But if you hear me yell, come fast."

"Good," Martin said. "Never mind the living room. I'll take care of that."

Nadine, carrying a candle in a wobbly hand, disappeared through one of the doors down the hall. Martin went into the living room and studied the clock again.

Finally he sat down in the chair which Brill had occupied and grim-



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aced at the bloodstains on the back of it. That knife had gone clear through Ray Brill. There was no use looking for fingerprints on it now. He didn't have the necessary equipment. That could come later. Martin sat there in the utter quiet, trying to put together the blocks of the crazy pattern which made up this case. It was the strangest puzzle of his career.

The clock was the only tangible clue and that clock could not possibly work. Martin was no expert at clocks, but he knew they needed springs and not rusted ones that came apart at the slightest touch. He got up, opened the clock door again and pushed the pendulum experimentally. It went all the way back, swung lazily, and came to a quick halt. He tried it again and was somewhat amazed at the weight of the pendulum.

He went to the foot of the stairs and called Nadine's name. The little man answered promptly from somewhere far to the rear of the house. Attorney Carver called back from upstairs. Neither had seen or heard anything.

Martin chewed on his lower lip a moment, went over to the table on which lay the letter of a man who had been executed only a few minutes before and who had sworn he'd return to this house as a spectre. Martin studied the note carefully, using a pair of candles to do so.

Then he returned to the clock with quick, eager steps. He spent a few minutes at it, hurried to the cellar and was there for quite some time. All in all, his task required almost half an hour.

HE WAS stepping back from the clock when he heard a yell from upstairs. Drawing his gun, he raced up the stairs. The shout was repeated and followed by a dismal groan. Martin came around the corner into the east wing. The flickering light of his candle revealed a man on the floor, trying to get up.

It was Attorney Carver. His fore-

head was bathed in blood and carried a lump that grew bigger with each passing instant.

"I—saw—something," he explained weakly.

"And felt it, too, by the looks of the lump on your head," Martin said. "What happened?"

"I was getting ready to enter Ted Hanley's room. It's that one right beside you. As I turned the door knob, I felt a cold breath and the candle I held went out. Well, I stood there waiting and shaking in my boots. Nothing further occurred so I relit the candle. As the flame rose, I saw someone over there."

Carver pointed down the hall.

"It was a man. He wore dark trousers and a white shirt open at the neck. He began moving toward me and he didn't make a sound. I backed away, naturally, and I was too darned scared to yell for help. He leaped at me. I couldn't even raise my arms in defense. Something hit me on the head. As I fell, I saw him dart into that room. Ted Hanley's room."

Martin took a firmer grip on his gun, twisted the door knob, and flung the door wide open. Holding the candle high, he stepped in. Carver was right behind him. They searched a spacious closet, looked behind furniture, and even under the bed. There was nobody in this room.

Martin faced Carver. "I don't think you realize it, but the costume of the man you described is identical with the clothes a condemned man wears when they take him to the chair."

Carver gulped. "I—never realized. Martin, do you think there is anything to this—this crazy legend?"

Martin shrugged. "I'm almost ready to believe anything. By the way, where is Nadine? He must have heard you yell."

They left the room quickly and went downstairs. Nadine wasn't there. Martin rushed to the second floor and searched it. He found a stairway in back, a narrow passageway probably meant for the use of servants. Nadine

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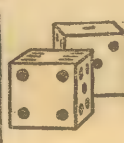
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could have slipped up here via this route. He could have been the "ghost" which Carver saw.

Carver came up to join him and they discussed the idea.

"Our next move is to find him," Martin said. "There is a third story to this house. The one where those towers and gables are. Stay down here and watch. I'm going up and see if Nadine is there."

Martin climbed the steps and swore he would never go anywhere again, even in broad daylight, without a flashlight. The candle gave only flickering, deceptive illumination. He moved into one of the tower rooms, found nothing but an accumulation of dust and started down the long corridor. He saw another tower room door open.

Martin went in. There was broken glass all over the floor. He discovered one window was smashed and dust still hung heavy in the air. He peered through the broken window. Far below, he knew, were jagged rocks. The house was on the brink of a steep cliff.

Somehow, Martin thought he'd found Lou Nadine. Later, armed with as many candles as they could carry, he and Carver found Nadine's body in the ravine. It was crushed almost beyond recognition.

"Well," Martin said, "I think that winds up our case. Nadine must have killed Brill, thought we'd be scared off and when we didn't scare, he got panicky and killed himself by jumping through that tower window. One thing though—I did not hear the old clock strike out to announce Nadine's death and it certainly was a violent end."

Carver shuddered. "I think it's time we went for help. What do you think?"

Martin nodded. "First though, we'll go back to the house and talk the case over. It's bizarre enough so we ought to agree on every detail. Come on."

IN THE big living room, Martin sat down in the chair where Brill had died. He crossed his legs and took out

a cigarette. He lit it, leaned back and puffed in contemplative silence.

Carver sat on the bottom step of the staircase, near that ornamental newel post. His chin was cupped in both hands.

Finally Martin said, "We can assume that Nadine is the killer. A weak-kneed little rat who summoned enough nerve to kill Brill, but lost that and bumped himself off. He wanted Ted Hanley's inheritance, but—was he working in league with Hanley or did Nadine just take advantage of circumstances that developed?"

"He didn't visit Hanley, if that's what you mean," Carver said.

"But it seems to me that the murderer must have known these things were to happen. The knifing was timed with the clock striking eleven. What made the clock strike? How did you mistake Nadine as being dressed in the outfit of a condemned man?"

"He might have changed," Carver offered. "He might have put on those clothes."

"Yet that means he came prepared. He knew what was in the letter and wanted to act on the presumption that Ted Hanley was coming back as a ghost," Martin argued. "Maybe we'd better go at this from a different angle."

"What do you mean?" Carver asked quickly.

Martin took a long puff on his cigarette. "Well, the motive for murder is obviously the possession of Hanley's estate. Hanley's letter indicated that either Brill or Nadine, whichever one survived, inherited. Maybe Hanley knew they'd try to murder one another and wanted it that way."

Carver snapped his fingers. "That's it, Sergeant. Hanley was no fool."

"And neither am I," Martin said blandly. "If Nadine was the murderer, he wouldn't commit suicide. Not by a long shot. A man who'd murder to get control of an estate would fight to protect that which he killed to obtain. I think Nadine was lured to the tower

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room and thrown through the window."

"But good heavens," Carver cried, "who else is in the house? We've searched it. There is only you and I."

"Precisely," Martin nodded. "You could have committed both murders with the idea that I'd accept the fact that Nadine killed Brill, lost his nerve, and jumped out of the window. There's motive too. As Hanley's attorney, you were in complete control of the estate. You may have helped yourself or intended to. How about it, Carver? Want to come clean or do I throw you in the jug and sweat the truth out of you?"

"You're guessing," Carver shouted. He made a sudden dive for a gun under his coat and trained the weapon on Martin.

"All right, you're too clever. Yes, I killed them. Yes, it was to get the liquid assets of Hanley's estate. I made up the story about the ghost. I even wrote that letter I professed as coming from Hanley. But you won't do anything about it, Sergeant, because you'll die too. I'll kill you just as I killed Brill."

"Make the clock strike and all?" Martin asked calmly.

"Yes. I can make that clock strike any time I want to. Hanley rigged it. He meant to kill Brill some day. He was pretty good at handicraft. See those candlesticks? They contain magnets, electrically controlled. There are batteries hidden in the cellar. By touching a hidden switch, the current alternates from one candlestick to the other. The magnets attract the metal pendulum and make the clock tick. The mechanism controlling the chimes still works. I'll start it going. When the last chime strikes you'll die."

"IT WILL be pretty fast, won't it?" Martin asked with a frown. "Mind telling me how you could wield a knife when you were standing so far from Brill? Did you throw it?"

"No," Carver gloated. "A knife couldn't be thrown with such force.

If you had a chance, you'd notice the chair you occupy, the one in which Brill was seated, is fastened to the floor. It can't be moved. In this newel post an especially constructed knife is hidden. The haft blends perfectly with the wood carving. It is equipped with a sensitive cell. The last note of the chime is pitched to react on this cell. It releases a powerful spring and the knife is propelled at whoever occupies that chair. Hanley told me all about it weeks ago."

"We can't bargain?" Martin asked.

"Why should I?" Carver snapped. "I'll say Nadine operated this mechanism. He was a member of the family. He lived in the house some years ago and could be expected to know of this arrangement. He had the motive. I'll claim to have unmasked him, chased him to the tower room after he killed you, and he dived through the window."

The gun steady, Carver went over beside the table and assumed the same position he'd taken when Brill died.

"I merely have to touch a hidden switch," he said, "and the thing starts. You'll hear the clock strike ten times, Sergeant. I don't think you'll hear the eleventh stroke. Notice I have already turned the hands back. In one minute you'll die."

Carver touched the hidden control. The pendulum didn't move. He tried again, cursed, and sprang toward the clock. In his anxiety to get the mechanism working, he turned his back on Martin for one bare instant. That was all Martin needed.

He came out of the chair like a catapult. Carver whirled, tried to raise his gun, but Martin knocked it out of his hand. Then he flattened the crooked attorney with one solid punch to the jaw.

When Carver woke up, he was in the murder chair and his wrists were handcuffed.

"Don't worry," Martin grinned. "I'm not going to start the clock. I couldn't. You see, Carver, I figured something was done to that clock. So

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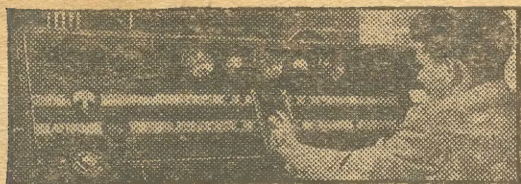
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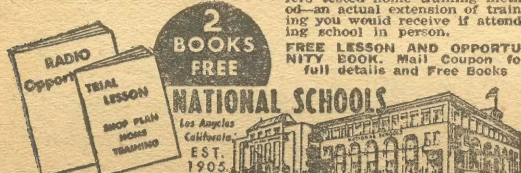


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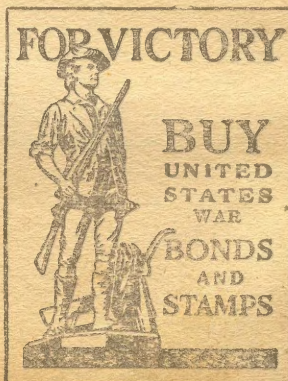
"I had to find out where the knife was hidden though, so I let you have your own way about things. Your ghost story of seeing Hanley in a condemned man's clothes was just made up and you socked your own head to bolster the yarn. That was a neat confession you made too, but really the letter gave you away right from the beginning."

"Nobody else would have seen that letter," Carver ground out. "I was going to destroy it. But you're guessing again—that I wrote it."

"No, I'm not," Martin wagged his head from side to side. "That letter was written with a fountain pen. You can tell by the smoothness of the writing. An ordinary pen runs dry in the middle of several words in letters as long as that. It had to be a fountain pen and no condemned man in the prison of this state is permitted to use a fountain pen."

"Why?" Carver asked and full terror was sweeping over him.

"Because one prisoner who used to be a doctor, cheated the executioner a long time ago. He inserted the pen point into a vein and pumped air into his blood stream with it. He died, of course, and the warden made sure it would never happen again. The note gave you away, Carver. Something usually does give a murderer's hand away."



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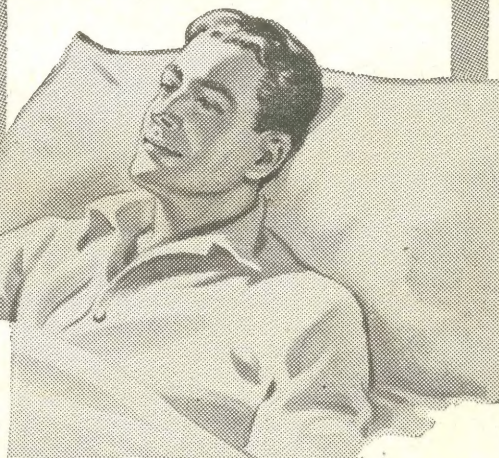
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